

GRIEF SUPPORT IN  
THE LOCAL  
CHURCH

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **GRIEF SUPPORT IN THE LOCAL CHURCH**

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The context is Sandy Grove AME Zion in Lumber Bridge, North Carolina. The problem in my church is that there is not a grief support system to address “Grief Support in the Local Church.” There is no grief support ministry to help those that are grieving. This dissertation’s hypothesis contends that if I implement this grief awareness program, then pastors and church leaders will be equipped to provide pastoral care to those who grieve. Pastors and church leader’s confidence will increase as they sit with people grieving the challenges of life. Qualitative analysis included pre, post surveys, observations, and interviews.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First, I give God the highest praise for what God allowed me to do. I want to acknowledge the following people, without whom I would not have completed this project and without whom I would not have made it through my doctoral degree! The United Theological Seminary staff and faculty, my mentors Dr. Jerome Stevenson, Dr. Thomas L. Francis, Dr. Jonathan McReynolds, and Dr. Sharon Ellis Davis, whose insight and knowledge into this project steered me through this journey. Also, from the bottom of my heart, I would like to say a big thank you to the entire semester six cohort group for the love and support through these past six semesters, especially Yvette Richards and Marlon Tilghman.

Furthermore, I give a huge thank you to the Pastoral Care and Counseling Focus Group for their support and encouragement throughout this process, especially Lora Hubbard and Kimberly Johnson, who are now both doctors of the church. Also, to Anthony White, Sylvia Mosley, and Russell Alexander, thank you for helping me as I helped you stay the course, and now the four of us are at our appointed time—doctoral graduation.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge again Rev. Dr. Russell Alexander, my friend, my beloved brother. Thank you for the carpool to United when we had to come to campus. Thank you for your prayers, words of encouragement, the push when I needed it, and the slowdown and rest when I was exhausted. You have been a true friend and

beloved brother since we met at Hood Theological Seminary on orientation day for the Master of Divinity. Thank you, sir, for always having my back and being a friend.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this doctoral project first to my wife of twenty years of marriage, Mrs. Alveda Marie Marable-Person. Thank you, honey, for your understanding, encouragement, and love. This book is our book. When I decided to go to school for my undergraduate degree, you said to me, “I got you,” and you held me every step of the way. I love you and thank you.

I dedicate this to my three children—Katina, Cameron, and Kevin. I love you guys very much. Moreover, as I always instilled in you guys the importance of a good education. I pray that you follow my lead, and one day, my grandchildren Jayvion, Maliyah, Quincy, and Mariah will follow yours.

To my mother Minister Brenda Jean Richardson and my bonus mother Judy Person, thank you for your motherly love and advice. To my sister Leondra P. Ray, thank you for your love and support. To my brother Pastor Leonard Jermaine Richardson and my sister Yolanda Richardson, thank you two so much for caring and watching over our mother in my absence. The things you guys gave up for me to pursue my education will never go unnoticed. I love you both. Furthermore, thanks to my sister-in-law, brother-in-law, nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

I give special thanks to the three churches that I pastored where at each I received a degree—Jordan Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Southern Pines, North Carolina, Love Grove African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in West End,

North Carolina, and Sandy Grove African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Lumber Bridge, North Carolina. Additionally, thank you to my hometown, to Zion Grove in Eagle Springs, North Carolina, and Robbins, North Carolina community for their love and support.

Finally, I give thanks to Rev. Dr. Sherwin O. Greene, Sr., who spoke into my ministry after I preached my trial sermon. He said, “Son, if you are going to be anything in the AME Zion Church, then you need to go to school.” Well, I went, and now I am a doctor of the church. So, thank you, sir, for pushing me, and encouraging me to this point.

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## INTRODUCTION

The impulsion to write a spiritual autobiography then apply it to context of my ministry brought life to the biblical reflection that produced the ministry focus. It allows the reader to see why grief support is so important. One of the most challenging aspects of the human experience is dealing with the loss of a loved one. Although death marks the end of human life, it can affect the life of the ones closest to the deceased. Loss is an inevitable part of our lives that brings with it a wide variety of challenges and opportunities.

Often, the griever is left in a sea of pain, which can bring doubt, isolation, and emotional conflict. What is grief. Grief is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as a “deep and poignant distress caused by or as if by bereavement.”<sup>1</sup> As the grieving believer turn to the church for support in their time of grief, the church may find itself unequipped on how to handle or support the needs of the bereaved because experiencing the death of someone is life changing.

The examination of the biblical foundation in John 11:35 “Jesus wept” sets the tone for the project. By Jesus weeping, Jesus teaches us that it is ok to grieve, and it is ok to cry. Jesus grieved over his friend Lazarus, and he also lost his cousin, John the Baptist. Jesus allowed himself to grieve and expressed his emotional state through weeping. The

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam Webster, s.v. “grief,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/grief>.

grief of God testifies to that dynamic, living relationship that exists between God and humankind. The biblical passage, John 11:35, informs this project consisting of a counseling model for the church to use as a grief support system to address grief in the local church.

The historical foundation chapter looks at the life of Saint Augustine of Hippo and his expression of grief at the passing of his childhood friend, while examining various voices that have opined on his grief. Augustine notes that a fever ceased him afresh and his friend died at a time that Augustine was not with him. This marked a season of deep grief in the life of Saint Augustine. He grieved because of his absence at a time his friend was taken away, he grieved for their lack of total reconciliation, and he grieved for the permanent loss of this friend whom he dearly loved. Augustine allowed himself to go through the grieving process at the passing of his friend. He acknowledged the loss, allowed himself to mourn.<sup>2</sup>

In chapter four the theological chapter will examine this phenomenon of grief in the African American church from a theological standpoint in the face of Liberation Theology. Liberation Theology is important to this project because of the restricted form of grieving that needs to be transformed into a liberated process that allows the African American to grieve freely and properly. The obstacles, hindrances, and restrictions that have historically curbed this type of proper grieving needs a release. Liberation Theology provides that needed analysis and reason to bring a person into a place where they are free to grieve. Dr. James Cone is the founder of Liberation Theology, and his intake and input of the African American church and community at large, and how they grieve bears

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<sup>2</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 62.

importance to this research. It is fair to surmise Dr. Cone's view, which will be detailed in the following sections, to be that the African American grieving should be done beyond "the living room, beyond the concept of what happens in my house stays in my house, beyond talking to the pastor. He believes that it is okay to seek professional help and counselling."<sup>3</sup>

Chapter five investigates and examine after examining the theory of grief within the discipline of psychology, we will also examine how this interacts with the overall project's biblical, historical, and theological foundations. The theory method engaged is that of integration where grief theory intersects with the various foundational chapters.

Chapter six documents and records the challenges of training that affirms that leaders and pastors can be made aware of the need for aiding grieving members within their church communities as they embrace some of these principles of grief theory or even collaborate with grief counsellors to guide the bereaved on a wholesome journey of grieving and recovery. This ministry project will provide compassionate care and grief support to the grieving community to heal body, mind, and spirit following the loss or anticipated loss of a loved one. For the last twenty years of my life as a funeral director has brought about an explosion of interest in the field of death, dying, and bereavement. Especially dealing with the death of my grandparents, business partners, and my father. This grief training seminar will provide clergy with the knowledge they need to become better grief facilitators and help assure the best outcomes for their congregations and their families.

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<sup>3</sup> Janeé R. Avent and Craig S. Cashwell, "The Black Church: Theology and Implications for Counseling African Americans," *The Professional Counselor* 5 (2015), <https://tpcjournlnbcc.org/>.

This ministry project will involve the collaborative efforts of Professional Associates, the Ministerial Alliance, and the Sandy Grove AME Zion Church. The context of the ministry project will consist of pastors and preachers in the Ministerial Alliance in the community of the local churches. This ministry project will be held in a private room at the Sandy Grove AME Zion Church Family Life Center facility in which I serve as pastor. Pre-tests, post-tests, surveys, and seminars will serve as the resources to conduct and complete this ministry research project.

The context and professional associates will provide their ranges of expertise on the effects of grief counseling in the church and in the immediate community in which they served for the past ten years. They will also serve as consultants in writing, designing, developing, and executing various phases of the ministry project. Lastly, they will offer input on the questions included on the pre-test, post-test, and surveys that will be instrumental tools in collecting data from the participants.

The Ministerial Alliance will provide the participants for the project, and these participants will be better equipped. These participants will also gain a deeper understanding of how to deal with grief to be better pastors when it comes to grief for the members of their congregations and their church communities. These participants will also acquire the ability to inform those in their congregations who lost loved ones of their knowledge of what God says about death and the hereafter. The Ministerial Alliance is comprised of Love Grove African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Holly Grove Church, New Destiny Ministry, Restoring Hope of Deliverance Church, Marsh Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, St. Ruth United Church of God, Cedar Grove Missionary Baptist Church, Creek Grove Christian Pentecostal Holiness Church, Zion

Grove African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and Full Gospel Holiness Church. All churches are in Moore County, North Carolina. The Sandy Grove Family Life Center is a part of the Sandy Grove African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, which I serve as pastor. Our Family Life Center has multipurpose rooms upstairs that persons may use for small private meetings. The Center also has a larger meeting space downstairs for any necessary big or combined meetings.

People may say that we fail to grieve or fail to quickly and correctly grieve over a loss. However, the truth is that grief fails to wrap up quickly or neatly. The death of a dear loved one is a life-changing event. I often used the example that we do not expect new parents to get back to the way things were before they had their first baby, so why do we assume we will get back to life as it was before the death of a loved one? Life will never be like it was, no matter how much time elapses. Hopefully, the pain of loss will not be as intense as it was at first, but it is unreasonable to expect that a grieving person will get back to life exactly as it was before.<sup>4</sup>

This grief training seminar will respond to the need within our communities, medical centers, hospices, churches, and other agencies in which persons may call upon preachers. This comprehensive grief seminar will provide the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to interact with the bereaved and facilitate their grief. This ministry project training program is unique in many ways and continues to provide cutting edge material.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jason Troyer, “Grief Steps: Healing at Your Own Pace,” Grief Steps, <http://griefsteps.com/>.

<sup>5</sup> Alice Parsons Zulli, “Our Mission,” Grief Training, <http://grieftraining.org/grief-training>.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross described five popular stages of grief, “popularly referred to as DABDA. They include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Counseling is a more solid approach toward grief. Support groups, bereavement groups, or individual counseling can help you work through unresolved grief.”<sup>6</sup> This is a beneficial treatment alternative when you find that the grief event creates obstacles in your everyday life; that is if you have trouble functioning and need some support to get back on track.

While not a method of “curing” from loss, the Kübler-Ross Model provides coping strategies to help effectively deal with grief. The Kübler-Ross Model is a tried-and-true guideline, but there is no right or wrong way to work through grief, and it is normal for personal experiences to differ while working through the grieving process.<sup>7</sup> The post-assessment questionnaire will again measure participants’ grief knowledge post-workshop to determine if there was any change in their general understanding on how to deal with grief.

Francis writes that “In today’s society, pastors are seen as biblical shepherds who offer care with the support of the spiritual community; therefore, pastoral counseling is not a mere profession, but a function performed by persons in the profession of ministry.”<sup>8</sup> Coping with the loss of a close friend or family member may be one of the hardest challenges that many of us face. When we lose a spouse, sibling, or parent, our grief can be particularly intense. Loss is understood as a natural part of life, but we can

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<sup>6</sup> Christina Gregory, “The Five Stage of Grief – Understanding the Kubler-Ross Model,” PsyCom.net, 2016, <https://www.psycom.net/depression.central.grief.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Gregory, “The Five Stage of Grief,” <https://www.psycom.net/depression.central.grief.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas L. Francis, *I Watched Them Die and Dying Lives Matter* (Atlanta, GA: TFran Publishing, 2016), 16.

still be overcome by shock and confusion, leading to prolonged periods of sadness or depression. The sadness typically diminishes in intensity as time passes, but grieving is an important process to overcome these feelings and continue to embrace the time had with loved ones.

Everyone reacts differently to death and employs personal coping mechanisms for grief. Research shows that most people can recover from loss on their own over time if they have social support and healthy habits. It may take months or even a year to come to terms with a loss, and there is no “normal” length of time for someone to grieve. One should neither expect to pass through phases of grief, as new research suggests that most people fail to go through stages as progressive steps. If one’s relationship with the deceased was difficult, that adds another dimension to the grieving process. It may take some time and thought before being able to look back on the relationship and adjust to the loss.

Human beings are naturally resilient, considering that most of us can endure loss and then move forward with our own lives. However, some people may struggle with grief for longer periods of time and feel unable to carry out daily activities. Those with severe grief may experience complicated grief, and these individuals could benefit from the help of a psychologist or another licensed mental health professional with specialization in grief.<sup>9</sup>

The theme of the project is Grief Support in the Local Church. The project aims to explore how I failed to handle personal situations well in the past and to demonstrate that there are different ways to handle and deal with grief. I lost many close family members

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<sup>9</sup> American Psychological Association, “Grief: Coping with the Loss of Your Loved One,” APA, <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/grief>.

that were dear to me. I lost a brother at an early age, my grandparents who raised me, my dad, and a brother that died six years before my dad died in an automotive accident.

Being in the funeral business all my life, I saw people grieve in so many ways. However, as I look at myself, I failed to truly grieve at the losses near and dear to me. In dealing with the deaths of others, I learned how to suppress my grief and keep moving forward. I know that this is not good, and one day it may all fall on me with me being unable able to handle it, but I pray that God will continue to see me through.

I try to do what I was raised to do and surpass what is expected of me. I have a lot of weight on my shoulders and do not want to let anyone down. Failure is not an option because if I fail, then I have let down all who have poured into me in making me what I am. I have two good businesses that I have been blessed with, and I used them for good to help people in their time of grief. I bring peace and consolation to a community that views me as a community figure who helps and not as a person who is all about self and a dollar.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

#### **Introduction**

My life was filled with negative behaviours that led me down the wrong road. If I lacked the support systems to advocate, nurture, support, and challenge me, God knows where I would have ended up. There are far too many people who travel in this same direction who lack the benefit of mentors, support groups, or family. Without these types of support, these people will be more prone to continue down this road, which can lead to prison, homelessness, being an outcast, or being murdered.

No one knows one's pain like the person who experiences it, so no one else has the same desire for a miracle. Instead of seeing through the eyes of faith, we are often, looking through the eyes of pity, or at best, hope. People may even feel inconvenienced by our need for advocacy, intervention, and support. People will try to silence the voice of faith, but faith can never be silenced. Persons should not be dissuaded by the doubters, but should get rid of blind faith, begin to look through the eyes of faith, see the impossible and witness miracles come to pass in their lives. God will increase one's faith to walk in the same direction and be miraculous with God. If one has a need in one's life, depression, suicide, loneliness, abandonment, or even defeat they can just give it to God and stand on God's promises. One source states the following:

Ever wonder what the future of the small-town twenty call a year firm is? When I started in the family funeral business in 1980 in a regional center type of community—1,097 population—we served an area about fifteen miles around us. Outside of that fifteen-mile radius there were several small communities that each had its own thirty or more call mortuary. In a small community, with very little cost of doing business, and a low-key lifestyle the funeral director and/or owner in that community could do very well. In many of those communities the local funeral home consisted of the first floor of the residence where the funeral director and spouse lived.<sup>1</sup>

However, in our case, we lived in our own homes about five miles from our funeral home. The same article adds that:

Life was slow-going and just over two calls a month did not cut into the funeral director's time to also be a part of that community. As for income, virtually all services were full traditional services with casket and vault sold at retail. In today's dollars, – coupled with the professional services charge, – that could equate up to a \$7,000 margin per case. Twenty or so cases at a \$7,000 margin with very few expenses for overhead or advertising provided a great income for the family albeit with very little time off a call schedule. What has happened then, to cause mortuary schools, state departments of health and the industry itself to talk about relaxing licensing requirements for funeral homes because of the difficulty of attracting talent (new owners) to rural areas across the country? Firstly, all, in today's world, nobody wants the twenty-four hour, seven days a week schedule; – look no further than the disappearance of family dairy farms to see that fact. Secondly, with the advent of cremation and its use now reaching 60% or more in many states, the revenue margin is not nearly as much for a small-town operator to have a standard of living similar to that of the 1980 small-town funeral director. Finally, it appears that many of our young people, or at least those early in their adult life, prefer to live in more populated areas. It will be interesting to see how the funeral service industry deals with this in the future. Will small towns lose their funeral homes and be serviced by businesses thirty or more miles away? Will educational requirements be relaxed so that small towns have their version of a funeral planner? Will home health care agencies or hospices get into the death care business? Perhaps, it will be a combination of all those ideas? Funeral service has always evolved to serve the consumer public for the past 200 years; it will continue to do so—maybe with ideas that we have not even dreamed up yet.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Funeral Director Daily, "Our Thoughts – The Future of Rural Funeral Homes," Funeral Director Daily, February 16, 2017, <https://funeraldirectordaily.com/our-thoughts-the-future-of-rural-funeral-homes/>.

<sup>2</sup> Funeral Director Daily, "Our Thoughts – The Future of Rural Funeral Homes," <https://funeraldirectordaily.com/our-thoughts-the-future-of-rural-funeral-homes/>.

Another article states that:

Funeral planning in a small town is a much different affair than funeral planning in a large city. Not only is one faced with fewer options when it comes to funeral homes, but privacy is often hard to come by. It can be very difficult to make decisions when one knows the whole town is watching and expecting them to stick to tradition, and you might feel trapped into making choices you might not otherwise choose. There are pros and cons to life in a small town, and funeral homes are a part of that. Depending on what one is looking for in a funeral plan, here are a few of the things they can expect. In a big city, there are usually several different funeral homes to choose from; one can compare prices and services to find the one that they like best. In small towns, however, there is usually just one funeral home—and it is the same one people have been going to for decades. In most cases, the prices will be similar to industry standards, so one will not have to worry too much about being taken advantage of. If there is concern, one may compare their general price list (which they are legally obligated to provide) with those of other funeral homes. One may also opt to purchase a casket or other materials online and have them delivered. Although it is not always true, many small towns hold fast to their old traditions—including having family-owned and—operated businesses. One is more likely to find a funeral home that has not yet sold out to a corporate entity, and they also probably know the family who runs the facilities. This can be a great comfort for the type of person who wants to know the funeral director on a more personal level. Of course, not every small town has a funeral home nearby, some are too small to support a funeral home or may not have a cemetery within county lines. In most cases, support services will exist to make funeral planning easier over a long distance. The funeral director may be able to come to one's home to go over the options and plan the funeral, or one may have to do a little driving. Travel can be difficult during this time; this is one instance in which funeral pre-plans (with all the decisions already made) can make a big difference. Small towns tend to be slower to adopt new technologies and modern practices, and the funeral industry is no different. There is a tendency to stick to a formal burial in the local cemetery and have a potluck memorial service at town hall. There can be great comfort to be found in this type of scenario, but if one is looking for something more out-of-the-ordinary, they may need to have the remains transported to the nearest metropolitan center. People in small towns tend to love the lifestyle there, complete with the focus on family and community—especially during times of grief. Funeral planning as a community can be a great comfort, but it can also come with drawbacks. If a person or their loved one lives in a smaller area, they should plan ahead so that they have access to the funeral they really want.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Matt Presnell, "What to Expect from Small Town Funeral Homes," iMortuary, July 30, 2012, <https://www.imortuary.com/blog/what-to-expect-from-small-town-funeral-homes/>.

## Context

The context is Sandy Grove AME Zion Church in Lumber Bridge of Robeson County, North Carolina. According to the United States Census Bureau, “Lumber Bridge, North Carolina is the 541st largest city in North Carolina based on official 2017 estimates.”<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1. Demographic information for Lumber Bridge, NC**

Population in 2017: 90 (0% urban, 100% rural).
Population change since 2000: -23.7%
Males: 46 (52.2%)
Females: 44 (47.8%)
Median resident age: 59.8 years
North Carolina median age: 38.7 years
Zip code: 28357
Estimated median household income in 2016: \$47,198 (it was \$40,938 in 2000)
Lumber Bridge: \$47,198 NC: \$50,584
Estimated per capita income in 2016: \$32,146 (it was \$12,513 in 2000)
Estimated median house or condo value in 2016: \$120,183 (it was \$70,000 in 2000)
Lumber Bridge: \$120,183
NC: \$165,400
Mean prices in 2016: all housing units: \$131,935; detached houses: \$134,454
Median gross rent in 2016: \$725.
March 2019 cost of living index in Lumber Bridge: 87.2 (less than average, U.S. average is 100)

Sandy Grove has an inspiring history, which spans over 158 years with sound spiritual leadership. In the early days of the church, Sandy Grove met the needs of its members as well as the needs of the community. However, along the way the people lost their passion and zeal for the word of God and stopped coming to church. Sandy Grove has a membership of 122 African American members with youth members ages from one to seventeen years of age, and twenty members in the age range of forty and older. The millennial ages of eighteen to thirty-five is the crowd that is lost and inactive in the

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<sup>4</sup> City-Data, “Lumber Bridge, North Carolina,” City-Data, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Lumber-Bridge-North-Carolina.html>.

church, as only approximately ten attend. With a membership of 122 and only thirty-six in attendance, I have my work cut out for me at this church. My congregation is at a standstill, and I must reclaim the lost portion of my congregation. I am passionate about my ministry, and to get Sandy Grove back to the way it used to be before I became pastor, I must go after the lost portion to let them know that I am there and that I love and appreciate them.

If someone misses two or three weeks in a row, they will get a call or visit from me, they may be going through a rough time. Jesus stressed the importance of this in Luke the fifteenth chapter. I would rather have people complain because we loved them too much than because no one ever cared enough to call on them. If they have strayed from the body of Christ or God, we must go after them. A phone call does not take that much time, we ask how they are doing, pray with them, and show we care. I have recently joined the ministerial alliance in my area to help bring awareness not just to my church but to church in general about the great falling away of our young adults.

### **Ministry Journey**

My paternal grandparents raised me. My mother and father were both alive at this time, but I am the oldest grandchild, so they raised me as their own. My grandparents were both morticians. After high school, I intended to join the army and run away from my problems, but my grandparents sat me down and gave me an intervention. They told me to go to Fayetteville Technical Community College in Fayetteville, North Carolina and obtain my associate degree in funerals service education; so, I went. While I was in mortuary school, my grandfather had a heart attack. When I was at the hospital to visit

him, he told me three things before he died: the first thing was to take care of my mother (grandmother), secondly, to finish mortuary school; and finally, he said to me, “Son, you need to stop running and do what the Lord is calling you to do.” The next day he died.

In 2013, a good friend of the family got sick. He was a funeral homeowner and started out in the business around the same time as my grandfather. When he got sick, his neighbor and I were the ones who cared for him until his death. To me, he was like a father figure, and he considered me as a son. He was a widower and had two stepsons, but they were not on good terms; fortunately, he had me. We lost him in February 2014; when he died, he left us his funeral home because we cared for him until he died. Thus, today I have two funeral homes: my family business where I serve as the third generation, and a funeral home that I inherited because I showed myself as a friendly and Godly man.

Within two years of our inheritance of the funeral home, my business partner fell ill. I then began helping his wife take care of him by making him comfortable at the hospice house. After three days of going to the hospice house, he entered my father’s house upon death. Within a four-year timeframe, I inherited a funeral home with a man and then that man died. I must keep this inherited funeral home going because of the promise I made to both of my funeral business partners; and it has been hard.

The funeral home that I inherited brought me many challenges; because of my business partner’s sickness after which he lost both interest in his business and he lost accountability. Now that I have the business, I must rebuild the business communally, physically, mentally, and spiritually. I make myself known to and available for the public, so that they know who I am and what I have to offer through the funeral home.

For the past several years, all I have done is advertise and promote my business. People are beginning to know who I am and to put trust in the new, reconstructed funeral home I operate in their area. One of the best promotions is accepting invitations to preach revivals around my inherited funeral home. The people saw the spirit and godly side of me rather than just the business side. As a result, the business is beginning to stand a little on its own now. Faith leaders, in the same way, are called to help others stand on their own. An awareness ministry project will help equip faith leaders with spiritual tools and offer a biblical foundation toward helping others to receive the support and mentoring that, literally saved my life.

### **Developing the Synergy**

I intend to explore with my project the many challenges in ministry that I face as a pastor. For example, helping families who go through divorces, drug and alcohol abuse, death, and having to face criticism in the church from irritable church members. Another example is providing much needed comfort when family members deal with the death of a loved one. How does one find strength to continue when it feels like they carry the weight of the world upon their shoulders? Our life from start to finish is filled with unexpected valleys of trouble. One of the most difficult things about life is that trouble, trials, and tribulations will always come.

God allows trials and tests of our faith to spiritually mature us. We do not rejoice in the trials and trouble themselves, but in their possible results. Testing will prove whether we are genuine while trials will serve as a discipline to purify our faith. Patience does not mean lying down and playing dead in difficult circumstances, endurance is an

opportunity to overcome all with joy. Our life here on earth is a training program for eternity, and God allows opportunities to grow or use our faith to get the victory. Trouble is something that will come upon each of us, it will afflict the innocent and the guilty. It does not matter if one is White or Black, male or female, old or young, educated or uneducated, rich or poor, religious or not religious, small or great, sinner or saint—they will have trouble. Trouble does not discriminate; it will rain on everyone's life.

Some folks want a life with no hardships, problems, difficulties, sorrows, disappointments, frustrations, burdens, cares, suffering, sickness, and troubles; they just want to skate through life problem-free. I am always amazed at the things through which God sends God's faithful servants. One would think that if God is going to go out of God's way to select a person or people to work for God, God would safeguard them from all crises, trials, and tribulations. It seems strange that God would call me and then send me into a battle to face trials and tribulations. I have been through all this, and God has brought me through, so, I am a living testimony of what God can do. With this project I seek to become a better pastor and community leader, bringing awareness to those who need it. I was blessed with two businesses, and I want to help others in their time of need.

## Conclusion

Francis writes that "In today's society, pastors are seen as biblical shepherds who offer care with the support of the spiritual community; therefore, pastoral counseling is not a mere profession, but a function performed by persons in the profession of ministry."<sup>5</sup> According to the APA:

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas L. Francis, *I Watched Them Die and Dying Lives Matter* (Atlanta, GA: TFran Publishing, 2016), 16.

Coping with the loss of a close friend or family member may be one of the hardest challenges that many of us face. When we lose a spouse, sibling, or parent, our grief can be particularly intense. Loss is understood as a natural part of life, but we can still be overcome by shock and confusion, leading to prolonged periods of sadness or depression. The sadness typically diminishes in intensity as time passes, but grieving is an important process in order to overcome these feelings and continue to embrace the time had with loved one. Everyone reacts differently to death and employs personal coping mechanisms for grief. Research shows that most people can recover from loss on their own through the passage of time if they have social support and healthy habits. It may take months or even a year to come to terms with a loss, there is no “normal” time period for someone to grieve. One should not expect to pass through phases of grief either, as new research suggests that most people do not go through stages as progressive steps. If one’s relationship with the deceased was difficult, this adds another dimension to the grieving process. It may take some time and thought before being able to look back on the relationship and adjust to the loss. Human beings are naturally resilient, considering that most of us can endure loss and then continue on with our own lives. However, some people may struggle with grief for longer periods of time and feel unable to carry out daily activities. Those with severe grief may be experiencing complicated grief, these individuals could benefit from the help of a psychologist or another licensed mental health professional with a specialization in grief.<sup>6</sup>

The theme of the project is Loss: Are You Prepared? The plan for this project is to explore how I failed to handle personal situations well in the past, and to demonstrate that there are different ways to handle and deal with grief. I lost many close family members that were dear to me. I lost a brother at an early age, my grandparents who raised me, my dad, and a brother that died six years before my dad died in an automotive accident.

Being in the funeral business all my life led me to see people grieve in so many ways. However, as I look at myself, I failed to truly grieve the losses that were near and dear to me. In dealing with the deaths of others, I learned how to suppress my own grief and keep moving forward. I know that this is not good, and one day it may all fall on me and I might be unable to handle it, but I pray that God will continue to see me through.

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<sup>6</sup> American Psychological Association, “Grief,” APA, <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/grief>.

I try to do what I was raised to do and surpass what is expected of me. I have a lot of weight on my shoulders and do not want to let anyone down. Failure is not an option, because if I fail then I have let down all who have poured into me in making me what I am. I have two good businesses with which I was blessed and I used them for good to help people in their time of grief. I bring peace and consolation to a community that views me as a community figure who helps, and not as a person who is all about self and a dollar.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The content for this project is Sandy Grove AME Zion Church. The problem in this church is that there is no grief support system to address “Grief Support in the Local Church.” There is no grief support ministry to help those that are grieving. The hypothesis is that if I implement this grief awareness program, then pastors and church leaders will be equipped to provide pastoral care to those that grieve. This project will use qualitative analysis including pre- and post-surveys, observations, and interviews as measurements to test this hypothesis.

The scripture chosen for this project comes from John 11:32-36. These verses support the focus of this project and deals with how Jesus wept and dealt with grief, specifically in verse thirty-five, “Jesus wept.”

David Lamont’s *Empathy of God* says “Two passages in the Gospels and one in the Epistles (Heb. 5:7) teaches that Jesus wept. In the Gospels the Lord wept as God looked on people’s misery, and both instances demonstrated the Lord’s (loving) human nature, His compassion for people, and the life He offered to those who believe. When Jesus wept, Jesus showed all these things.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Lamont, “Empathy of God: A Biblical Theological Study of the Christological Implications of John 11:35” (Master’s thesis, McMaster University, 2001), 2.

The content of John 11:1-45 covers the death and resurrection of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha and a friend of the Lord Jesus. Jesus wept when He came into the midst of the brethren mourning Lazarus as we see in verse thirty-five. Jesus was weeping because Lazarus was his friend, but he was not weeping over death itself. This is because he knew he was going to raise Lazarus from the grave. However, Jesus in his human nature wept.

Lamont, in his *Empathy of God* notes how the very great miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead easily overshadows this short sentence of Jesus weeping.<sup>2</sup> He continues to note that the entire recounting of the Lazarus story could have been done without mentioning Jesus's weeping, yet the narrator added it in verse thirty-five. He speculates that the combination of Jesus being human and Lazarus being his friend caused this expression of grieving unique to human beings. Lamont further quotes Tom Lutz, when he observes that "weeping often occurs at precisely those times when we are least able to fully verbalize complex, 'overwhelming' emotions, least able to fully articulate our manifold, mingled feelings. We recognize in crying a surplus of feeling over thinking, and an overwhelming of our powers of articulation by the gestural language of tears."<sup>3</sup>

This writing will take a look at the role of grieving and tears as seen with the Christ, looking at the macroscopic literary context of the Book of John with a narrowed literary analysis of the eleventh chapter, a look at the historical and social context of the

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<sup>2</sup> Lamont, "Empathy of God, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Lamont, "Empathy of God, 2.

chosen pericope followed by a brief exegesis and analysis of verses thirty-two through thirty-six.

### Literary Context

John's Gospel has been known to be a highly Christological book, written to show that Jesus was Christ, the Son of God, and to believe in him was to receive eternal life. This gospel also reveals Jesus as a healer, the Word of God that speaks God's word. In John's Gospel you will notice the John the beloved disciple had a close personal relationship with Jesus, just as Mary, Martha, and Lazarus does. John was present at many of Jesus' high moments in ministry. He was present at the tomb of Lazarus. Conway's NRSV introduction to John notes that the book was divided into main sections. The first section consisting of chapters one through twelve, showing the Jesus of signs and wonders, revealing his identity as the Divine Son of God. It is within this section that our chosen scripture passage is found, which revolves around one of the notable signs in the raising of Lazarus from the dead.<sup>4</sup>

The second chapter, Conway continues, beginning at chapter thirteen to the end consists of Jesus's preparation for his departure.<sup>5</sup> This Gospel contains some unique features which Conway identifies include the long discourses with specific individuals, and the employment of the phrase "I am" such as "I am the door" (Jn. 10:7); "I am the Way" (Jn. 14:6) and so on.<sup>6</sup> The Johannine Gospel also has the most references of the

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<sup>4</sup> Colleen Conway, *Introduction to John* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1917-1918.

<sup>5</sup> Conway, *Introduction to John*, 1917-1918.

<sup>6</sup> Conway, *Introduction to John*, 1918.

Christ calling The Lord God “Father.” Conway finally mentions the reference to irony as a literary style in this book, giving the example of Jesus’s interaction with Pilate when he asks of Christ “What is the truth?” when Christ himself was the Truth as he proclaimed earlier.<sup>7</sup>

### **Literary Context of John 11**

As an overview of John chapter eleven, it starts with Jesus being informed that Lazarus was ill. Lazarus was the sister of Mary and Martha, all of whom were described as dear friends to the Lord. Luke 10:30-42 recounts the story of Mary and Martha, including Jesus staying in their home. It is where we learn about Martha’s busyness in serving her guests while her sister Mary sat at the feet of the Lord, to Martha’s annoyance. Ralph Wilson zeroes in on the affection among the family and Christ in John 11:3 by the manner in which Jesus is informed that Lazarus is ill: “Verse three describes Lazarus as ‘the one you love,’ using the verb *phileō*, which means ‘to have a special interest in someone or something, frequently with focus on close association, have affection for, like, consider someone a friend.’”<sup>8</sup>

Right at the onset, Jesus proclaims that his illness and even death would be to the glory of the Father, choosing to use the term “sleep” when he is eventually informed of Lazarus’ death. This confuses the disciples in the beginning, with Jesus explaining to them that he means he is dead. The disciples follow him to the village of Bethany where Lazarus resided with his sisters Mary and Martha, who also happened to be dear friends

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<sup>7</sup> Conway, *Introduction to John*, 1917-1918.

<sup>8</sup> Ralph F. Wilson, “I Am the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:1-54),” John Walks Bible Study Series, [www.jesuswalk.com/john/20\\_resurrection.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/20_resurrection.htm).

to the Lord. His arrival necessitates conversation with the sisters. Jesus's responses however to the sisters reveal different aspects of his identity. He revealed his identity as the Son of God who has power over life and death to Martha, as seen in his professions concerning her deceased brother "your brother will rise again." (John 11:23). In his response to Mary however, Kim Stephen recounts "he reveals His humanity as John, as (John 11:28-37). Jesus was "deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (John. 11:33). Jesus even wept (Jn. 1:35), so that those around Him said, "See how he loved Lazarus" (Jn. 11:36)."⁹ Stephen describes that scene as Jesus revealing his tender heart, which ministered deeply to Mary, knowing that the one who had such power and divine authority also ministered to her individually as the "Good Shepherd." This display of love, Stephen says, sets the stage for the Lazarus miracle as recorded in a few words in John 11:38-44.<sup>10</sup> As mentioned earlier, chapters one through twelve illustrate the miracles of Christ, and this particular miracle of Lazarus been raised from the dead reveals his nature as the one who gives life.

The verses after the miracle show the various reactions to Lazarus being raised as seen in the diverse reactions in general to the miracles of Jesus. The chief priests were worried "if we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation" (Jn. 11:48). One of the priests, Caiaphas prophesied unknowingly that Jesus would die for all (v. 49-52). The consensus through the voice of the Sanhedrin is seen in verse fifty-three. "So from that day on the

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<sup>9</sup> Kim S. Stephen, "The Significance of Jesus' Raising Lazarus from the Dead in John 11," last modified March 11, 2011, Galaxie Software Electronic Publishing, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/bsac168-669-04>.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen, "The Significance of Jesus' Raising Lazarus," <https://www.galaxie.com/article/bsac168-669-04>.

plane to put him to death" (Jn. 11:53). Stephen notes that "Caiaphas's judgment to sacrifice Jesus' life for the good of the nation ironically predicted the kind of death Jesus would soon die" (Jn. 11:49-53). Jesus would give Himself voluntarily and vicariously. He gave His life so that others could live through Him. As the "Lamb of God" He took away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29), and His sacrificial death proved true to His claim: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."<sup>11</sup> From that point on Jesus became a wanted man, with orders being given by the Chief Priests and Pharisees that they should be informed of any sighting of him that they may arrest him (Jn. 11:57).

### **Historical, Social and Cultural Context**

The book of John like the other Gospels does not name an author. It was later believed by scholars that John Gospel was written by the beloved disciple (Jn. 13:23, 19:26) of Jesus who name was John. The Gospel of John is the fourth gospel, the gospel that stands alone that is not of the synoptic gospel. For John was the beloved disciple, the son of Zebedee and shared a space in the inner circle of Jesus. John is different in his framework and content than the other synoptic gospels because John's gospel celebrates Jesus differently than the other three gospels. "Just as the writer was a mystery to early scholars, the date had also been unknown, believed to have been written in stages. Some scholars, Conway date the book of John between AD 90 and 100. Other scholars date it between AD 85 and AD 95. This Johannine Gospel has been known as the spiritual

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<sup>11</sup> Stephen, "The Significance of Jesus' Raising Lazarus," <https://www.galaxie.com/article/bsac168-669-04>

gospel because of the symbolic ways it told stories of Jesus in ways the other three gospel did not.<sup>12</sup>

The Gospel of John unveils the majesty and power of Jesus Christ. The Word was made flesh, dwelt among us, and manifested His glory to the world and to bring glory to his Father. John's Gospel clearly shows the omnipotence of Jesus Christ, who is worthy of our faith and trust in him. There is no nativity story in John's Gospel, but John starts by invoking in the beginning as it is in Genesis 1:1. He showed the nature of God and the nature of the Word, Jesus Christ.

In this Gospel, Jesus presents himself as the image of God the Father, so that the one who sees Christ has seen God (Jn. 1:18), the one who follows Christ abides in God the Father (Jn. 14:23), and the one who knows Christ, knows that Father (Jn. 14:9). It is in this Gospel that Jesus offers himself as the way unto salvation and eternal life. In the theme of being the way and the life, our chosen scripture of John 11:32-36 is an illustration of Jesus giving life to Lazarus after he dies.

In the focal passage of the death of Lazarus and Jesus's weeping, some cultural insight is given by Borchet in the *New American Commentary* about weeping and grieving: "In the present story, weeping, indeed loud weeping or wailing, would have conformed to Jewish public mourning practices. Professional mourners and musicians were generally engaged to assist the family in expressing grief. The fact that Mary fell at the feet of Jesus and wept (*klaiein* or "wailed") was undoubtedly a signal to others that they too could support her in the weeping or wailing process (Jn 11:31, 33a)." <sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Colleen Conway, *Introduction to John* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1917-1918.

<sup>13</sup> Borchert, *The New American Commentary*, 358-360.

In looking deeper into the depth of weeping and tears, Lamont writes that “Tears are a kind of language, a primary, and often primal, form of communication. The weeping of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus raises a question regarding exactly what Jesus is communicates through the language of his tears. What does the statement that Jesus wept tell us about Jesus and what, if anything, does it tell us about God? Rarely have persons taken seriously the weeping of Jesus in the history of the church; and rarely have persons sought to understand the picture of God.”<sup>14</sup> “He continues his discourse by referencing Greek cultural ideas, which presumably see the male species being less inclined to express such emotion. This creates tension at the thought that the Divine Lord would show such a disapproved emotion such as weeping for the grief over the world, an act deemed inappropriate for a Creator.”<sup>15</sup>

As a reminder, the scriptural pericope for this project is John 11:32-36, building a foundation that focuses on weeping or grief as illustrated in the life of our Lord Jesus in the account of the death of Lazarus. The following section will take a microscopic look at these verses, beginning with parallel translations of the passage in the KJV, NRSV, NIV and ESV. This is to smooth out tensions in translations of specific words and phrases, bringing more understanding to the overall intended thought. The exegesis will be followed by a brief analysis as it relates to the topic of grieving and how the Lord Jesus both allowed himself to grieve and then dealt with his grief.

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<sup>14</sup> Lamont, “Empathy of God,” 2.

<sup>15</sup> Lamont, “Empathy of God,” 2.

## Exegesis

Table 2. John 11:32-36

	<p>New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)</p> <p><sup>32</sup> When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”</p> <p><sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.</p> <p><sup>34</sup> He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”</p> <p><sup>35</sup> Jesus began to weep.</p> <p><sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”</p>
<p>New International Version (NIV)</p> <p><sup>32</sup> When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”</p>	<p>English Standard Version (ESV)</p> <p><sup>32</sup> Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”</p> <p><sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also</p>

<p><sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. <sup>34</sup> “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied.</p> <p><sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.</p> <p><sup>36</sup> Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”</p>	<p>weeping, he was deeply moved<sup>1</sup> in his spirit and greatly troubled. <sup>34</sup> And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.”</p> <p><sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.</p> <p><sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”</p>
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John 11:32, states, “When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”” In this verse, Mary had met Jesus instead of following the group of mourners to the place of burial. Martha had just finished speaking with Jesus, who assured her that her brother would rise again. Mary asks the exact same question her sister in verse twenty-three had just asked Jesus: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (Jn. 11:32). The diversity of answers received however shows us that that is where the similarity in scenarios end.<sup>16</sup>

John 11:33 states, “When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.” In this verse we see different parties and their various reactions. “First, we see Mary through the eyes of Jesus, who is weeping. Then we see the Jews who accompanied her, also weeping.

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<sup>16</sup> All biblical citations will be from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted, John 11:32, 11:21.

Finally, we see that Christ himself is present and described as “greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.”<sup>17</sup> The KJV translates the latter as “he groaned in the spirit and was troubled.” Before we take a closer look at this phrase pertaining to the Christ, let us look at the word “weeping” used for Mary as well as the mourners. Wilson further identifies the verb used in John 11:31 as well as John 11:33 as the Greek word *klaiō*, which means ““to cry, wail, lament,”” or any loud expression of pain or sorrow.<sup>18</sup> Wilson also explains that the culture of mourning in the Middle East is loud, and unrestrained crying as well as loud wailing. He cites the loud mourning at Jairus' house when his daughter died as an example, noting in that instance the use of the word *koptō*, which is “to beat one's breast as an act of mourning, mourn greatly.”<sup>19</sup> Wilson writes, “There the text describes the crowd of mourners as ‘aroused, in disorder.’ Jewish funeral customs dictated that even a poor family was to hire flute players (Matthew 9:23) and a professional wailing woman, and neither Jairus' or Lazarus' family was poor!”<sup>20</sup> This gives insight into the loud and expressive mourning atmosphere at the house of Mary and Martha.

We will now look at the phrases used concerning the Christ. First, in looking at the word “troubled” Wilson explains that “The Greek word is, *tarassō*, which means “to shake, stir up,” and, by extension, “to cause inward turmoil, stir up, disturb, unsettle, throw into confusion.”<sup>21</sup> Writers use this word in literature when referring to mental and

<sup>17</sup> Ralph F. Wilson, “I Am the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:1-54),” John Walks Bible Study Series, [www.jesuswalk.com/john/20\\_resurrection.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/20_resurrection.htm).

<sup>18</sup> Wilson, “I Am the Resurrection and the Life,” [www.jesuswalk.com/john/20\\_resurrection.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/20_resurrection.htm).

<sup>19</sup> Wilson, “I Am the Resurrection and the Life,” [www.jesuswalk.com/john/20\\_resurrection.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/20_resurrection.htm).

<sup>20</sup> Wilson, “I Am the Resurrection and the Life,” [www.jesuswalk.com/john/20\\_resurrection.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/20_resurrection.htm).

<sup>21</sup> Wilson, “I Am the Resurrection and the Life,” [www.jesuswalk.com/john/20\\_resurrection.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/20_resurrection.htm).

spiritual agitation and confusion.<sup>22</sup> He cites an example in John 13:21 when that same word is used when Jesus speaks of his betrayal.

The second phrase we will look at is “deeply moved.” The English translations as we see, give the impression of Jesus’s empathy. In Wilson’s exposition however, he says “when writers use *embrimaomai* elsewhere in the New Testament and in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, it is nearly always in the context of anger. The verb is derived from “*en, meaning*” “on” +*brimomai*, meaning “snort with anger, to be indignant.”<sup>23</sup> He believes that better modern translations should include the idea of Jesus’ anger, or the word “indignant.” Borchert also boldly states that “The reaction of Jesus to that kind of wailing by the mourners was hardly empathetic support. The result was that Jesus became “disgusted” or “angered” (the Greek is *embrimassthai*) in his spirit and “perturbed” (*tarassein*) by the actions of the people (Jn. 11:33).”<sup>24</sup>

Even though this sentiment of Christ’s anger flows through both Wilson and Borchert’s analysis, Wilson postulates that it is difficult to interpret Jesus’s emotions, strong as they were. He writes that it is not that difficult to understand the emotions of Mary, Martha, and their accompanying mourners. He notes “Though the burial had probably taken place on the day of Lazarus’ death four days prior, the period of mourning was thirty days, with intense mourning for the first three days and first week.”<sup>25</sup> This would give reason to the intense grief expressed by the sisters, even though they seem to mourn in different ways. Jesus’s grief on the other hand is more difficult to interpret.

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<sup>22</sup> Wilson, “I Am the Resurrection and the Life,” [www.jesuswalk.com/john/20\\_resurrection.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/20_resurrection.htm).

<sup>23</sup> Wilson, “I Am the Resurrection and the Life,” [www.jesuswalk.com/john/20\\_resurrection.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/20_resurrection.htm).

<sup>24</sup> Borchert, *The New American Commentary*, 358–360.

<sup>25</sup> Wilson, “I Am the Resurrection and the Life,” [www.jesuswalk.com/john/20\\_resurrection.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/20_resurrection.htm).

Borchert notes that “In contrast to German translations of this sentence, Beasley-Murray has argued convincingly that English polite translations (including the NIV’s ““he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled””) have failed to give sufficient negative impact to the Greek words in the sentence. The sense conveyed by most English versions is that Jesus was troubled along with the Jews over the death of Lazarus because he loved Lazarus (Jn. 11:36).”<sup>26</sup> Borchert argues his position by pointing out that the phrase is an observation of the mourners, and not the Christ himself, cautioning the reader to not rely solely on what others were saying about Jesus since it may be skewed. Considering that Jesus had already declared that Lazarus’s illness would “not end in death” but would bring glory to God and to the Son of God (Jn. 11:4). Borchert reasons that it is doubtful that Christ’s tears in this case are those of empathy.<sup>27</sup> He continues to argue that the negative sentiment of Christ was because he was facing his enemies, one being death, and the other more important one, unbelief in the mourners. Mourners who collectively failed to see the divine authority that was in their “midst in the person of Jesus Christ.”<sup>28</sup>

John 11:34-36. He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus began to weep. So, the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

The prior verse referenced Jesus as “disturbed in spirit and deeply moved,” in this verse we see an escalation of emotion to “Jesus began to weep” after he is told to come and see the tomb. It is difficult to place the position of Jesus at the time of his weeping: if it was at the time he was told to “come and see;” or if there was a moment of moving into position by the tomb and laying his eyes on it causes him to reach the point of weeping. In spite of his actual position, and therefore the actual reason, the narrator makes sure to note that.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Borchert, *The New American Commentary*, 358–360.

<sup>27</sup> Borchert, *The New American Commentary*, 358–360.

<sup>28</sup> Borchert, *The New American Commentary*, 358–360.

<sup>29</sup> Wilson, “I Am the Resurrection and the Life,” [www.jesuswalk.com/john/20\\_resurrection.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/20_resurrection.htm).

Wilson explains that “John carefully used a different word (*dakryein*) for Jesus’ tears; a word that is not used elsewhere in the New Testament. It seems to suggest that the evangelist wanted to send a signal to his readers not to misinterpret Jesus’ weeping just as the Jews in the text appeared to misinterpret His tears.”<sup>30</sup> Wilson then lists out the scenarios that create the complications: first, the mourners saw Jesus’ tears as mourning one he loved in their expression “see how he loved him” (Jn. 11:36); followed by the questioning of his obvious divine power in “could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” (Jn. 11:37); culminated with the thought that with him being in the ground four days, there was no hope of a miracle.<sup>31</sup>

Wilson continues in his postulating that:

If true, that the meaning of *embrimaomai* is ‘to be indignant,’ then these probably were not tears of compassion or empathy for the bereaved. They are possibly tears due to the unbelief he sees around him. Jesus also wept over Jerusalem, when he thought of the devastation that would come to it because of the unbelief of its leaders (Luke 19:41).<sup>32</sup>

Regarding Jesus’ weeping, Borchert identified other instances in which Jesus expressed depth of emotion. Once was when he groaned over Jerusalem’s failure to turn to him in Matthew 23:37-39 and Luke 13:34-35. Another instance when he prayed for the salvic future of his followers in John 17:9-26. Also, in Gethsemane where he travailed concerning his upcoming difficult cup to drink as well as for the strengthening of his disciples as seen in Matthew 26:37-41, Mark 13:22-37, Luke 22:40-46 and John 2:27–28.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Wilson, “I Am the Resurrection and the Life,” [www.jesuswalk.com/john/20\\_resurrection.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/20_resurrection.htm).

<sup>31</sup> Wilson, “I Am the Resurrection and the Life,” [www.jesuswalk.com/john/20\\_resurrection.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/20_resurrection.htm).

<sup>32</sup> Wilson, “I Am the Resurrection and the Life,” [www.jesuswalk.com/john/20\\_resurrection.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/20_resurrection.htm).

<sup>33</sup> Borchert, *The New American Commentary*, 358–360.

Simmons broadens the look at grief by the Trinity. Beginning with the Father in Genesis 6:6: “And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart,” referring to the sinfulness of the human race. He was grieving, and even says he is sorry he created men in verse seven. The second person of the Trinity, the Son is described in Isaiah 53:3-10 as a man of sorrows, one acquainted with grief. The third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit also grieves over the disobedience of Israel and the church as seen in Isaiah 63:10.<sup>34</sup> This is a brief look at the expanded expression of grief within the various members of Trinity. If they can express grief, then so can we.

Wilson, in “I am the Resurrection” says “All this wailing and clamor of mourning followed Mary from her house to the tomb. Indeed, Mary seemed to be immersed in it herself (John 11:33). Just as Jesus had been upset with this sound of unbelief at Jairus' home, so he seems upset here as well.”<sup>35</sup> I agree with Wilson because Mary brought the grieving from her house to the tomb, which made her bring the unbelief from the house to the graveyard. Jairus, similarly trying to get Jesus to his home to lay hands on his child, finds out on the way, that his child has died. When Jesus got to his home that same unbelief in the form of weeping and wailing that Jesus experienced with Mary and Martha was present. Just as Jesus knew he was going to raise Lazarus, he knew that he was going to raise Jairus' child, and the unbelief made him upset, to the point of grieving.

Wilson notes that contrary to the ambiguity of Jesus's emotions, the mourners equate Jesus' tears for sympathy based on the love he had for Lazarus as seen in John

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<sup>34</sup> William A. Simmons, “Grief, Grieving,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996), 318–319.

<sup>35</sup> Wilson, “I Am the Resurrection,” [www.jesuswalk.com/john/20\\_resurrection.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/20_resurrection.htm).

11:3. He believes there's more to it than just sympathy or even empathy, writing that, "As much as one might like to view Jesus as a perfectly composed Zen-like figure here, the Jesus of this narrative is far more conflicted in how he views the situation; it is complicated for him."<sup>36</sup> Wilson goes on to explain that Jesus at this time is about to raise Lazarus, one of his most powerful signs and even one of his last ones, through which his Father's kingdom will be glorified. This does not make the task any easier or enjoyable, since his beloved friends suffer in the process.<sup>37</sup>

Considering his personal fellowship and love for these individuals, Sullivan brings up important questions to consider such as what Jesus must have been feeling at the time. He notes that "Certainly, Jesus felt very conflicted, perhaps partly angry, hopeful, resigned. As theologian Anne Robertson points out, how very like our own grieving."<sup>38</sup> Buchanan acknowledges that for the short verse that John 11:35 is, never has a verse contained so much theology and riches. He adds to the question of how Jesus felt by responding that "Here is love, mercy, passion, compassion, grief, and anger over the human condition, frailty, vulnerability; chiseled down to two words Jesus wept."<sup>39</sup> Campbell poses that "This resolution of agitation and resistance, and the broadening beyond the tension" is actually what makes Jesus weep.<sup>40</sup> In Sullivan's *Jesus Wept*, he

<sup>36</sup> Wilson, "I Am the Resurrection and the Life," [www.jesuswalk.com/john/20\\_resurrection.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/20_resurrection.htm).

<sup>37</sup> Wilson, "I Am the Resurrection and the Life," [www.jesuswalk.com/john/20\\_resurrection.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/john/20_resurrection.htm).

<sup>38</sup> Shada Sullivan, "Jesus Wept: A Sermon Delivered at the Church of the Holy City in Wilmington, Delaware," Spiritual Questers, <http://spiritualquesters.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Jesus-Wept.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> Mark Buchanan, "Jesus Wept," *Christianity Today*, last modified March 5, 2001, [http://library.mibckerala.org/lms\\_frame/eBook/JESUS%20WEPT.pdf](http://library.mibckerala.org/lms_frame/eBook/JESUS%20WEPT.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> Campbell, "Scriptures on "Grief," Counseling 4 Christians, [counseling4christians.com/Scriptures/Grief%20Scriptures.html](http://counseling4christians.com/Scriptures/Grief%20Scriptures.html).

quotes the writer Elizabeth Gilbert when she writes in a similar manner about her own experience of grief:

I have learned that Grief is a force of energy that cannot be controlled or predicted. It comes and goes on its own schedule. Grief does not obey your plans, or your wishes. Grief will do whatever it wants to you, whenever it wants to. In that regard, Grief has a lot in common with Love. The only way that I can “handle” Grief, then, is the same way that I ““handle”” Love — by not “handling” it. By bowing down before its power, in complete humility. How do you survive the tsunami of Grief? By being willing to experience it, without resistance. By being willing to feel everything. By being willing to accept the unacceptable. The conversation of Grief, then, is one of prayer and- response.<sup>41</sup>

Grief says to me: “You will never love anyone the way you loved [her].” And I reply: “I am willing for that to be true.” Grief says: “She’s gone, and she’s never coming back.” I reply: “I am willing for that to be true.” Grief says: “You may never recover from this” And I say: “I am willing.” I am willing, I am willing... I will live on, because I am WILLING. I am willing to take this life on God’s terms, not mine. Love’s terms, not mine. Grief’s terms, not mine. This is the job of the living — to be willing to bow down before EVERYTHING that is bigger than you. And nearly everything in this world is bigger than you. Let your willingness be the only big thing about you.<sup>42</sup>

In Sullivan’s view, Jesus says “I am willing” to his future as Elizabeth Gilbert portrays.

According to him Jesus not only says he is willing, but he weeps as well. He psychoanalyzes the “reasons for Jesus’ weeping which according to him includes his consent to the suffering of the cross, the knowledge that Lazarus will live though he has to go through the process of death, for his friends, for the life he will leave, for humanity and the inevitable number that will turn away, and still weeping at the same time for the hope and joy of the resurrection to come.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Lit Hub, “What it Mean to Surrender Your Grief,” Lit Hub, <https://lithub.com/elizabeth-gilbert-on-what-it-means-to-surrender-your-grief/>.

<sup>42</sup> Shada Sullivan, “Jesus Wept: A Sermon Delivered at the Church of the Holy City in Wilmington, Delaware,” Spiritual Questers, <http://spiritualquesters.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Jesus-Wept.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> Sullivan, “Jesus Wept,” <http://spiritualquesters.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Jesus-Wept.pdf>.

## Analysis

Jesus allowed himself to grieve and expressed his emotional state through weeping. We will now look at how Jesus dealt with his grief. Jesus dealt with the grieving process by raising Lazarus from the dead. It was no coincidence that he left Lazarus in the grave for four days. It was no coincidence that he tolerated the unbelief that surrounded his death. After he dealt with the unbelief and his grief by weeping, he moved on to minister to the people by raising Lazarus from the dead. Similar to us, after we have grieved, we need to pull ourselves together and deal with task that is at hand.

An interesting view by Binji on how Jesus dealt with his grief was by staying away. “He believes that if Jesus did not stay away while Lazarus was dying, he would have interfered with the purposes of God and healed him. Sure, it would have been a welcomed miracle by those close to the situation, but Jesus stayed away for four days, before making an appearance and doing a miracle of magnified proportion, raising Lazarus from the dead.”<sup>44</sup> Binji believes that in staying away, not only did it help Jesus cope with the grief of the process, but it satisfied the dual desire of the Father’s will being done in “allowing the witnesses to know that Jesus was the Son of God, that God sent Jesus, and that Jesus and the Father had the same will in everything (John 11:4, and John 11:40-42).”<sup>45</sup>

Regarding grief in the spheres of humanity and divinity, Simmons postulates that when it comes to grief and grieving, the scriptures do not try to explain the divine being

<sup>44</sup> Binji, “Jesus Wept: Why Did Jesus Weep,” Binji, <https://cc.bingj.com/cache.aspx?q=john+11%3a35+why+did+jesus+weep&d>.

<sup>45</sup> Binji, “Jesus Wept,” <https://cc.bingj.com/cache.aspx?q=john+11%3a35+why+did+jesus+weep&d>.

grieving in human terms. He says, “Rather, the subject of divine grief addresses the very essence of God as a person and the image of God in all persons. The grief of God testifies to that dynamic, living relationship that exists between God and humankind. Aristotle was right in that in many ways, God is not an “Unmoved Mover.”<sup>46</sup> This is a great analysis that once again proves that it is okay for humans to grieve because even the Divine, as we see in the analysis of the Trinity and grief, freely express their emotions through grief when the circumstance lends it.”<sup>47</sup>

I agree with Heukelem when he states that humans, because of sin, live in a fallen world, and subsequently experience loss, pain, distress and even sorrow. Heukelem continues in this vein by noting that humanity can only tolerate certain amounts of stress. To mitigate destruction and collapse, God in his infinite wisdom provided what Heukelem refers to as “tension releasers,” of which one of which is crying.<sup>48</sup>

I have lost many close family members that were dear to me. I lost a brother at an early age, my grandparents that raised me, my dad, and a brother that died six years before my dad died in an automotive accident. But when my dad died it really hit home for me. My father had his battle with sickness as well. He was bothered by a sore on his foot that would not heal, and him being a diabetic that was not good. After months of battling with that sore, he lost his right leg and had to wear a prosthetic. But that did not keep him down or hurt his faith. Unfortunately, just a year after losing his leg he was diagnosed with gall bladder cancer in 2017. Less than two months of being diagnosed he

<sup>46</sup> William A. Simmons, “Grief, Grieving,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996), 318–319.

<sup>47</sup> Simmons, “Grief, Grieving,” 318–319.

<sup>48</sup> John F. Van Heukelem, “Weep with Those Who Weep: Understanding and Helping the Crying Person,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 7, no. 2 (June 1, 1979): 83-84.

transitioned. Before he passed on to glory, my father told me. “Son, you are my oldest child. The family is in your hands now. And when I cross over, I want you to preach my eulogy.”

I walked out of my father room with weight on my shoulders. That night/morning around one o’clock a.m. I was home in bed sleeping. I woke up, looked at the clock and my body froze. I could not move. I was numb. At two o’clock a.m., an hour later my sister called me and told me that when she went in to check on Daddy he was gone. “Jeff he’s gone.” I said, “Ok I’m on my way.”

When I got to my father’s house my brother, two sisters, stepmother, aunts, and uncles were all there. Yes, my father had left us. After the hospice nurse had given us the paperwork, my uncle that works with me at the funeral home drove up with a hearse van to make the removal from the home. When he came into the house with the stretcher, before we put my dad on it, I asked the family to join hands in prayer. I asked my mom to grab Dad right hand while, I had Dad’s left hand, and we all made a circle around Dad’s bed. Hand in hand, I prayed a prayer for strength and a prayer that my dad’s spirit would be received in heaven.

As we look at grief, and how the Godhead dealt with grief, we can agree with Campbell when he says that grief is not an indication of a lack of faith but rather an expression of deep love we have for a person who is taken from us. We sometimes think that being a Christian makes us untouchable, but Campbell reminds us that “being a Christian does not rescue us from the pain of loss.”<sup>49</sup> We must rather remember that even the scripture exhorts that there is “a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn,

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<sup>49</sup> Brian Campbell, “Scriptures on ‘Grief,’” Christian Counseling, [counseling4christians.com/Scriptures/Grief%20Scriptures.html](http://counseling4christians.com/Scriptures/Grief%20Scriptures.html).

and a time to dance” (Ecc. 3:4). This means there will be periods of mourning in our lives that we cannot avoid. On the other hand, there will also be the overcoming of the grief and a season of joy. This knowledge should bring us hope in the period of mourning, just as Jesus told His disciples he will come for them, and their grief experienced due to his departure will once again be turned to joy. Campbell further reminds that grief does not carry into eternity, that the hope of a Christian is based on the fact that Jesus defeated death, and though loss of loved one is an irreplaceable on earth, the heavenly reunion will be amazing. In Campbell’s words of hope, “If you are grieving and brokenhearted, keep turning to God. Let God help wipe away your tears and heal your wounds. God promises that God will be close to the brokenhearted and save those who are crushed in spirit. If you know someone who is grieving or mourning, reach out to him or her in Christian love. Christians, are to carry each other’s burdens.”<sup>50</sup>

## **Conclusion**

From the scriptural analysis in the previous sections, we see that Jesus experienced sorrows and grieving as seen in the selected passage. The biblical passage, John 11:32-36, informs this project consisting of a counseling model for the church to use as a grief support system to address parishioner’s grief. Implementing this grief awareness program, will equip the leaders to provide pastoral care to those who are grieving. This project will establish a meeting place for parishioners that is a safe haven to have group dialogue. Some people are more emotional than others while some may tell you what on their mind all at once. This is clear from the text after “Martha said unto

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<sup>50</sup> Campbell, “Scriptures on ‘Grief,’” [counseling4christians.com/Scriptures/Grief%20Scriptures.html](http://counseling4christians.com/Scriptures/Grief%20Scriptures.html).

Jesus, Lord if you had been here, my brother had not died.” While Mary was quiet (Jn. 11:21). The leader should not steal this ministry from the people. Instead, the leader must empower the congregation to take ownership of caring for those that are grieving. This does not mean the leader neglects the hurting. Instead, it means you “equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph. 4:12) and enjoy ministering together. In addition, one who implements this project should not act as if one’s church is the only source of care the person will receive. Most of your members have friends and family who will support them in their losses as well. Leaders should be proactive in communicating and working together with others to provide care. I agree with Dr. Francis in his book *Death and Dying*, when he says this “type of ministry is a great opportunity to show that the church is a ‘team player’ concerned more about people’s needs than protecting their ‘own turf.’”<sup>51</sup>

Someone within the church needs to keep up with a “loss calendar.” This is a powerful tool that enables you to follow up with calls and cards three months, six months, and on yearly anniversaries of losses. One of the most difficult realities for grieving people is the realization that others are forgetting their loss. A timely note in the mail or call on the telephone can bring incredible joy.

From our in-depth look at John 11:32-36, these verses support the focus of this project, which is grief and how Jesus wept and dealt with grief. By Jesus grieving the death of his friend Lazarus, it signified that it was okay for us to grieve.

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas L. Francis, *I Watched Them Die and Dying Lives Matter* (Atlanta, GA: TFran Publishing, 2016), 48.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The context for this historical foundation is the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. The problem is that there is not a grief support system to address parishioners' grief. The hypothesis is that if a grief awareness program is implemented, then the leaders will be equipped to provide pastoral care to those who are grieving. John Archer, in his book entitled, *Nature of Grief*, quoted the American physician Benjamin Rush's address on grief when he says that grief is a "disease of the mind" with both immediate and long-term risks of mortality.<sup>1</sup> This description of grief emphasizes the attention that needs to be paid to grief and the need for the griever to receive care.

This chapter will examine grief primarily through the life of Saint Augustine of Hippo and his expression of grief at the passing of his childhood friend, while examining various voices that have opined on his grief. In Augustine's time (fourth century), grief received awareness because of the effort he made to draw attention to it. We will examine his life, his relationships, his expression of emotion and dealing with grief.

In John Archer's writing, he also mentioned some of Benjamin Rush's remedies for grief, which included opium, encouraging weeping and expressive emotion, and even

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<sup>1</sup> John Archer, *The Nature of Grief: The Evolution and Psychology of Reactions to Loss* (London, UK: Taylor and Francis Group, 1999), 4, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=180164>.

purges which would fall under accepted remedies for psychical illnesses at that time.<sup>2</sup>

This places an emphasis on how grief should both be allowed and guided, and not simply ignored as a state of emotion on the whim of a person.

## **The Life of St. Augustine of Hippo**

### *Background of Saint Augustine*

Saint Augustine was born in Tagaste, North Africa. He was born in 354 CE, to a father who was a Pagan Roman official and a mother, a fervent Christian. His mother, Monica, was known to pray constantly for her husband's conversion, a prayer which was eventually answered. We know this because Augustine frequently and fondly mentioned his mother in his writings. The lack of closeness to his father was also obvious in his lack of mentioning him in the same said writings. In recognition of Augustine's gifts and talents, his parents provided for him the best education, sending him to the town of Madaura until they were out of money.<sup>3</sup>

Augustine returned to Tagaste where he met friends of whom "he boasted of his sexual adventures – real or imagined – and joined in capers that he would one day rue as the sign of his own sinfulness."<sup>4</sup> When he was around seventeen years old, he was able to later travel to Carthage to further his education through the support of one Romanianus. He studied hard and played hard, indulging in the many secular pleasures Cathage had to

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<sup>2</sup> Archer, *The Nature of Grief*, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=180164>.

<sup>3</sup> CliffNotes, "Summary and Analysis Book 4: Chapter 4-13," St. Augustine's Confessions, <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/s/st-augustines-confessions/summary-and-analysis/book-4-chapters-413>.

<sup>4</sup> Justo Gonzalez, *History of Christianity* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010), 242.

offer and soon had a mistress who bore him a child, Adeodatus which meant “given by God.”<sup>5</sup>

Augustine’s primary discipline of study was rhetoric. Rhetoric at that time was the discipline of learning to speak and to write persuasively and elegantly. As Gonzalez notes, the purpose was not to bring out truth since that was the domain of philosophers.<sup>6</sup> Augustine’s studies led him to Cicero, who was a master of language as well as a philosopher. It was during this time that he was persuaded through Cicero’s writing that it was not enough to have an elegant writing style but also to bring out truth. His speaking of truth, however, found him as a student of Manichaeism. Manichaeism was of Persian origin founded in the third century by one so called Mani and was basically a belief of philosophical dualism. Its main teaching was the release of the spirit from matter through asceticism.<sup>7</sup>

As complex as Manichaeism was, it addressed Augustine’s issues with Christianity. The first issue being that the writings of the Bible were inelegant, and the second issue questioning the origin of evil. Since his mother, Monica, had taught him that there was only one God, he found it difficult to reconcile the source of evil which was all around him. Even with that, he still had doubts as a Manichee, being a “hearer” and never advancing in the religious ranks. Augustine’s doubts led him to Milan where he was introduced to the writings of the Neoplatonists by Simplicianus. Simplicianus’s aim was to introduce Augustine to his mother’s religion in the hope of his conversion. He became

<sup>5</sup> Gonzalez, *History of Christianity*, 242.

<sup>6</sup> Gonzalez, *History of Christianity*, 242.

<sup>7</sup> Webster’s Dictionary, s.v. “Manicheism,” MerriamWebster.com, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Manichaean>.

a Neoplatonist (an eastern conception that conceives of the world as an emanation from an ultimate indivisible being with whom the soul is capable of being reunited in a trace or ecstasy).<sup>8</sup>

Augustine still had doubts, which centered around what he felt was the crude language of the Bible and its gruesome depiction of love. How could this be the word of God? The answers were found through the sermons of Ambrose of Milan, whom his mother urged him to listen to. According to Gonzalez, Augustine started to listen to Ambrose purely for assessing his style. With time, however, he listened less for style, and listened more as a seeker. Ambrose reconciled a lot of Augustine's perceived tensions concerning the word of God, as Augustine accepted Ambrose's allegorical interpretations of scripture. This lessened the areas that appeared to be crude within the boundaries of allegories. Augustine gradually leaned toward Christianity. His dilemma became giving up other philosophical views and worldly pleasures to be a wholehearted Christian.<sup>9</sup>

Augustine's conversion came after two of his friends, who were high civil servants abandoned their careers to follow the monastic Saint Anthony. This happened after they had read Athanasius' publication, *Life of Saint Anthony*. Augustine described his conversion experience as a time of violent conflict within when his friends got converted, not being able to be in their presence. He then described a small garden he fled to that was next to their accommodations that they were free to use. At some point during his interchange with the Lord, he heard some youth singing 'pick it up and read it,' which he took to be direction from the Lord. He picked up his nearby book of the Apostle's letters and read the first thing he opened to, Romans 13:13-14.<sup>10</sup>

He recalls in Confessions:

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<sup>8</sup> Webster's Dictionary, s.v. "Neoplatonist," MerriamWebster.com, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/neoplatonist>.

<sup>9</sup> Gonzalez, *History of Christianity*, 245.

<sup>10</sup> Saint Augustine, *The Confessions* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 157.

I had no wish to read further, no what's their need. No sooner had I reached the end of the verse that the lights of certainty letter to my heart and all dark sheets of doubt flight away. I closed the book, marking the place with a finger between the leaves or by some other means, and told what had happened. My face was peaceful now.<sup>11</sup>

### *Augustine and Ministry*

Augustine visited a friend who lived in the town of Hippo, in 391 CE. While he attended church there, the bishop prayed for God's guidance to select a shepherd from among the congregation. Much against Augustine's will, he was chosen and ordained to serve with the Bishop Valerius in Hippo. Four years later, Valerius ordained Augustine as Bishop to serve with him, not wanting another church to take him. Not long after that, Valerius died, leaving Augustine to be the Bishop of Hippo. Augustine penned many great Christian works. Two significant works include his *Confessions*, which was his spiritual autobiography and prayer to God, *The City of God*. *The City of God* was his response to the allegations that Rome had fallen because it had abandoned its ancient gods.<sup>12</sup>

### *Augustine's Encounters with Grief*

Augustine had many encounters with grief throughout his life. These are recorded in his *Confessions*, where he bears his soul and emotions as prayers addressed to God. After Augustine's conversion, he set about to transform his entire life. Both he and his son Adeodatus were baptized by Ambrose, and he resigned from his teaching assignment. He then embarked on a journey to North Africa with his son, his mother, and a group of friends where he planned to spend the rest of his life in a monastic retreat. By then, Monica had persuaded him to dismiss his mistress of many years. At the very beginning of the journey in Rome, Augustine had an encounter with grief when his precious mother Monica took ill and died.

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<sup>11</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 157.

<sup>12</sup> Gonzales, *History of Christianity*, 250.

Gonzalez notes that “Augustine was so overcome with grief that it was necessary for him and his companions to remain in Rome for several months.”<sup>13</sup>

There he had another encounter with loss and grief. His son Adeodatus died. His most heartfelt grief was expressed, however, at the passing of his childhood friend who is not named. He writes that he had a friend of the same age who was dear to him and who shared his interests. This dear friend was a boy he “grew up with, went to school with, and played together with. Augustine, however, describes the friendship as falling short, defining true friendship as one bound together by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>14</sup>

Augustine describes their religious inclinations at the time when he says:

I had lured him from the true faith, which he had held in a thoroughly immature way and without conviction, to the superstitious and the baneful fables which my mother deplored in me. Already this man was intellectually astray along with me, and my soul could not bear to be without him.<sup>15</sup>

Augustine was quick to add that in spite of this, he still loved him dearly.<sup>16</sup> This friend, Augustine described, struggled with a fever during the first year of friendship. He was unconscious for a long time and became baptized during this time without his knowledge. Augustine despised this baptism, even though soon after his friend’s baptism he started to get well and receive strength in his body. When his friend came to, Augustine started to openly despise the baptism to his friend at which his friend took umbrage. Augustine had become his enemy, his friend warned him that if they were to remain friends, he should cease from speaking against his baptism before they fully reconciled. However, Augustine notes that a fever ceased him afresh and he died at a time that Augustine was

<sup>13</sup> Gonzales, *History of Christianity*, 246.

<sup>14</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 62.

<sup>15</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 62.

<sup>16</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 62.

not with him.<sup>17</sup> This marked a season of deep grief in the life of Saint Augustine. He grieved because of his absence at a time his friend was taken away, he grieved for their lack of total reconciliation, and he grieved for the permanent loss of this friend whom he dearly loved.

### *Augustine's Expression and Dealing with Grief*

Augustine allowed himself to go through the grieving process at the passing of his friend. He acknowledged the loss, allowed himself to mourn, and expressed his deep sorrow through his gift of penmanship. This led him to pioneer awareness of grief among philosophers of his time. In his words he writes:

Black grief closed over my heart and wherever I looked, I saw only death. My native land was a torment to me and my father's house unbelievable miseries. Everything I had shared with my friend turned into hideous anguish without him. My eyes sought him everywhere, but he was missing; I hated all things because they held him not and could no more say to me, 'Look, here he comes!' as they as been wont to do in his life time when he had been away. I had become a great enigma to myself, and I questioned my soul, demanding why it was sorrowful and why it so disquieted me, but it had no answer. If I bade it, 'Trust in God,' it rightly disobeyed me, for the man it had held so dear and lost was more real and more lovable than the fantasy in which it was bidden to trust. Weeping alone brought me solace and took my friend's place as the only comfort of my soul. All this is over now, Lord, and my hurt has been assuaged with time.<sup>18</sup>

Augustine's anguish is poignantly expressed in his prayer confession. We see the journey he went through as he grieved. David Kessler answers the question, "What is Grief?" By responding: "Grief is the internal part of loss, how we feel. The internal work of grief is a process, a journey. It does not end on a certain day or date. It is as individual as each of

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<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 62.

<sup>18</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 62.

us.”<sup>19</sup> Augustine’s grief is personal to Augustine’s personality. His profession as a writer, his tendency to throw himself wholly into whatever he commits to, all come through in his unique grieving process.

First, he acknowledged his grief. Black grief closed over my heart.<sup>20</sup> Kessler’s *Help for Grief Because Love Never Dies*, addresses the connection of loss to grief, stating, “The pain of loss is so intense, so heartbreaking, because in loving we deeply connect with another human being, and grief is the reflection of the connection that has been lost... The loss happens in time, in fact in a moment, but its aftermath lasts a lifetime.”<sup>21</sup> J. E. Dittes further “comments on this when he defines the span of time Augustine grieved to be twenty years, the time at which he wrote his *Confessions*. ”<sup>22</sup>

This is an uncharacteristically long time to grieve, even though there is no set time to grieve the passing of a loved one. “Boersma’s “Numbed with Grief” examines Apostle Paul’s words when he says in the latter part of 1 Thessalonians 4:13... “so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.”<sup>23</sup> Boersma notes that “Some have seen in his words a distinction between grieving per se, which would be acceptable, and

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<sup>19</sup> David Kessler, “Help for Grief Because Love Never Dies,” Grief.com, <https://grief.com/>.

<sup>20</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 62.

<sup>21</sup> Kessler, “Help for Grief Because Love Never Dies,” <https://grief.com/>.

<sup>22</sup> J. E. Dittes, “Augustine: Search for a Fail-Safe God to Trust,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 25, no. 1 (1986): 57-63, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0000960299&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>23</sup> Boersma, “Numbed with Grief,” 46-59, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001982849&site=ehost-live>.

grieving excessively, as if completely bereft of hope, which would be characteristic of the grieving of pagans.”<sup>24</sup>

The hope that the Apostle Paul is referring to is inferred to be the hope of the resurrection. In stating that one should not grieve as if there is no hope, is to classify grieving in compartments, where there is first, anticipation of resurrection and seeing the loved one again. Secondly, grieving that is not so boundless that it offers nothing but a message of hopelessness. Augustine’s span of grief bordered on a hopelessness, which is not surprising because at the time of his friend’s “death, he was not a believer, and would have had no anchor to hold onto for hope. It is within reason that in his conversion, and ensuing publication of his works, he allowed himself to appropriately deal with the crux of his grief, and eventually overcome it to move on with his life.”<sup>25</sup>

He acknowledged that weeping was his way of expressing and allowing himself to grieve. “Weeping alone brought me solace and took my friend’s place as the only comfort of my soul.”<sup>26</sup> Archer’s *Nature of Grief* references Charles Darwin’s writing on emotional expressions, describing the act of weeping as one associated with grief and depression.<sup>27</sup> Augustine expressed what he was actually feeling through his grief: “My native land was a torment to me and my father’s house unbelievable miseries. Everything I had shared with my friend turned into hideous anguish without him. My eyes sought

<sup>24</sup> Boersma, ‘Numbed with Grief,’ 46-59,  
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001982849&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>25</sup> Boersma, ‘Numbed with Grief,’ 46-59,  
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0001982849&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>26</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 62.

<sup>27</sup> Archer, *The Nature of Grief*, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=180164>.

him everywhere, but he was missing; I hated all things because they held him not ...”<sup>28</sup> In an article by The American Psychological Association, reference is made to the fact that “The embodied passion of grief can be extraordinarily powerful.”<sup>29</sup> The relationship of Augustine and his friend comes through powerfully, as well as the emotions associated eternal separation.

On the other hand, Augustine realized that his relationship with his friend was bordering on idolatry, possibly causing his grieving, to be more than it should be. The *Summaries and Analysis* of his Confessions states that: “In his book On Christian Doctrine, Augustine makes an explicit distinction between things that are used as means to an end and things that are enjoyed for their own sake. All temporal things are objects of use; God alone should be the object of enjoyment.”<sup>30</sup> The article’s Summaries and Analysis section goes on to explain how the love for individuals can become a stumbling block when they allow the individual to take the place of God in their lives. Augustine quoted ending that passage giving praise to Christ, “whose love is unfailing, and who is the only true source of rest and peace.”<sup>31</sup>

Augustine eventually acknowledges the effect that time has on his grieving: “All this is over now, Lord, and my hurt has been assuaged with time.”<sup>32</sup> He places this piece

<sup>28</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 62.

<sup>29</sup> American Psychological Association, “Grief: Coping with the Loss of Your Loved One,” American Psychological Association, <https://www.apa.org/topics/grief>.

<sup>30</sup> CliffNotes, “Summary and Analysis,” <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/s/st-augustines-confessions/summary-and-analysis/book-4-chapters-413>.

<sup>31</sup> CliffNotes, “Summary and Analysis,” <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/s/st-augustines-confessions/summary-and-analysis/book-4-chapters-413>.

<sup>32</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 62.

about time at the end of his written dirge, after acknowledging the different aspects of his grieving process. The American Psychological Association says: “The sadness typically diminishes in intensity as time passes, but grieving is an important process in order to overcome these feelings and continue to embrace the time you had with your loved one. Everyone reacts differently to death and employs personal coping mechanisms for grief.<sup>33</sup>

Augustine rightfully presses his grief, even to the point of acknowledging that “it was over” and “my hurt has been assuaged with time.” He developed his own coping mechanism as he questioned, searched, prayed, and wrote. The American Psychological Association in the same article mentions that there is no set time for grieving, neither do individuals go through the stages of grief in that necessary order. They also mention an additional point that if the relationship with the departed one was a “difficult” relationship, there is an added dimension to the process of grieving.<sup>34</sup> In Augustine’s case, he was not fully reconciled with his friend before he passed because his friend had converted to what he called the *True Faith*, whereas he had not. This was painful for Augustine, as well as the fact that he was not physically present at the passing of his friend.

Another dimension is added to grieving as mentioned in the article “What’s Your Grief?” The author mentions that there is a dimension of grief that sometimes happens before the death of a person. In the event of a prolonged illness, hospitalization, addiction, drafted for a war, and other similar situations, there is an unrecognized grieving process that begins at the possibility of death. With this pre-death grieving

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<sup>33</sup> American Psychological Association, “Grief,” <https://www.apa.org/topics/grief>.

<sup>34</sup> American Psychological Association, “Grief,” <https://www.apa.org/topics/grief>.

comes the overwhelming anxiety, dread, and hopelessness. There is panic when news of the person is available, taking a mental and emotional toll. To the extent that when the person eventually dies, a modicum of relief is experienced which could be followed by a sense of relief. The relief however is catered more toward the unloading of the mental stress and anticipation of the death.<sup>35</sup>

Augustine experienced this briefly when his friend lay for a long time ravaged by a fever and was thought of “at death’s door.”<sup>36</sup> His relief was what may have prompted him to despise the baptism performed on his friend, which eventually led to a strain in their relationship, bringing him into a different place of grief. He had to work through all these added dimensions to his grieving process.

In looking at Saint Augustine and his dealing with grief, in Benda’s words “There are several facets to grief” and ‘we are nearer to an understanding when we replace the term ‘grief’ with ‘bereavement’’<sup>37</sup> are appropriate in this story. Benda believes that “bereavement” better describes the human reaction to loss of a relationship. This loss, Benda continues, involves the loss of the very human interaction that may have been a constant in the bereaved person’s life. This loss of contact, as we saw with Augustine and his unnamed friend, affected Augustine deeply, and for a long period of time. Benda concludes the thought by stating that:

Grief is an emotion that deserves respect and reverence – almost a sacred feeling which we hate to see distorted by other, more human emotions. Nevertheless, if we talk about bereavement as an experience, we understand that human beings

<sup>35</sup> What’s Your Grief?, “Grieving Before a Death: Understanding Anticipatory Grief” (blog), What’s Your Grief?, last modified April 18, 2017, <https://whatsyourgrief.com/anticipatory-grief/>.

<sup>36</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 61.

<sup>37</sup> Clemens E. Benda, “Bereavement and Grief Work,” *Journal of Pastoral Care* 16, no. 1 (1962): 1-13, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0000682505&site=ehost-live>.

will react in many different ways. Their reactions will depend on their relationship with the one who has passed away and on their own ways of handling such a situation.<sup>38</sup>

Mentioned earlier as the notion that Augustine's twenty-year span of grieving was uncharacteristically long, especially in light of the fact that their friendship had not been good for many years. Yet, in reviewing the words of Benda, can one be sure that this was uncharacteristic? We see that though Augustine did not go through the widely propagated *Stages of Grief* (Death and Dying, Kubler-Ross)<sup>39</sup> he had a clear beginning and a clear end when he praised God that it was "over" and his "hurt was assuaged with time."<sup>40</sup>

"Psychology Today" reiterated the effect of time on grief in their article "Grief," by saying, "But symptoms of grief tend to lessen over time, although they may be temporarily reactivated on anniversaries or when other reminders of a loss arise. While negative thoughts such as "life is unfair" and "I'll never get over this" are part of the normal grieving process, it is important to prevent them from guiding your actions.<sup>41</sup> Here, they separate the grieving process from the continuity of life. Though one must grieve properly, and as long as it takes to overcome grief, at the same time waves of grief should not swallow the bereaved one to the point where they are incapable of continuing with life.

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<sup>38</sup> Benda, "Bereavement and Grief Work," <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLA0000682505&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>39</sup> Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (Oxfordshire, UK: Taylor and Francis, 1973), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=214467>.

<sup>40</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, 62.

<sup>41</sup> Psychology Today, "Grief," Psychology Today, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/grief>.

The commentary on Augustine's grief, *Augustine on the Problem of Grief*, states that "But, in the deepness of our grief and mourning we must not forget that the life, our life, goes on, and those who passed away surely would not like to see us mourning over their death for the rest of our lives."<sup>42</sup> At the same time, it is necessary to go through the process of grieving in order to overcome it and to lead a fruitful life. The author in *Augustine on the Problem of Grief* tells the story of a girl losing her single parent, mum, at the age of twenty years. At her mother's death, the girl found herself alone in the world and immediately had to go into survival mode of finding a job, making ends meet and living life. In this case, the author notes that the girl did not give herself time to grieve because of her immediate needs, and it, therefore, took more time for her to overcome it.<sup>43</sup> There has to be a right balance, which would be unique to each individual.

As facilitators, pastors, leaders, counsellors, clinicians and even friends and family, it is important to consider the next step after looking at Augustine and his relationship with grief?

Dr. Ken Walden says, "Looking into the soul of a person will help to care for the needs of the person. When an issue is overlooked, it does not go just away; it lingers as an unresolved issue that will constantly resurface."<sup>44</sup> Someone needed to look into:

Augustine's soul to identify the triggers that allowed his grieving to take the forceful and rather large span of time that it took. The need for care would have been identified and even possibly acted on. As Dr. Walden states, overlooking grief, ignoring it, and even being ignorant of it does not cause it to correct itself,

<sup>42</sup> Augustine, "Augustine on the Problem of Grief English Literature Essay," UKEssays, November 2018, <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/english-literature/augustine-on-the-problem-of-grief-english-literature-essay.php>.

<sup>43</sup> Augustine, "Augustine on the Problem of Grief," <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/english-literature/augustine-on-the-problem-of-grief-english-literature-essay.php>.

<sup>44</sup> Ken J. Walden, *Challenges Faced by Iraq War Reservists and their Families: A Soul Care Approach for Chaplains and Pastors* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 9.

but rather lends to a longer process of overcoming it. Dr. Walden adds that not only does it not go away, but it traps the bereaved in a place of depression, which becomes harmful to them. One of his proposed remedies for grieving is talking to a form of a counsellor with some experience of dealing with the emotions of the soul which are not to be taken lightly.<sup>45</sup>

With intentional words, he describes the care of the soul:

Soul is not a thing, but a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and ourselves... Care of the soul begins with observance of how the soul manifests itself and how it operates. It means to watch out for but also keep and honor, as in observance of a holiday. It has to do with modest care and not miraculous cure.<sup>46</sup>

Saint Augustine would have benefitted from this “modest care” that Dr. Walden was referring to. It would have allowed him to talk to someone about what was really driving his grief, which included the fact that he did not reconcile with his friend on a religious level before he passed, as well as his absence during his passing. The care of his soul would then have given him options that would effect reconciliation within himself and bring him to the peace needed to grieve in an appropriate manner. The “carer” would also have noticed if the grieving process was being prolonged and found out what the root of that was as well. This may have been a situation in the fourth century, but we can still learn from this over two thousand years later.”<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, the focus of this chapter was to analyze the life of Saint Augustine of Hippo and his expression of grief at the passing of his childhood friend. This focus is on the working hypothesis which states that if a grief awareness program is

<sup>45</sup> Walden, *Challenges Faced by Iraq War Reservists and Their Families*, 9.

<sup>46</sup> Walden, *Challenges Faced by Iraq War Reservists and Their Families*, 9.

<sup>47</sup> Walden, *Challenges Faced by Iraq War Reservists and Their Families*, 10.

implemented, then leaders will be equipped to provide pastoral care to those who are grieving.

In looking at Augustine's time of grieving, we saw how he journeyed through his grief. First, he acknowledged the grief. Then he allowed himself to grieve through weeping. He identified the root of his grief outside the death of his friend, which included the closeness he had with the friend which took the place of God in his life. He recognized that his strain also came from the fact that he did not reconcile with his friend on religious beliefs before he passed. All these helped him through the grieving process, and he was able to overcome this with time, and with God's help, which he also mentioned.

Facilitators, pastors, leaders, counsellors, clinicians, and even friends and family, can glean much from the analysis of Augustine's handling of grief as mentioned in the previous section. Someone needed to look into Augustine's soul to identify the triggers that allowed his grieving to take the forceful and rather large span of time that it took. The need for care would have been identified and even possibly acted on. It is easy for one grieving to withdraw, or not grieve properly. It becomes the job of the facilitator to pave the way to healthy grieving.

Healthy grieving can start by a prayer by St. Augustine:

Lord Jesus, our Savior, let us come to you. Our hearts are cold; Lord, warm them with your selfless love. Our hearts are sinful; cleanse them with your precious blood. Our hearts are weak; strengthen them with our joyous Spirit. Our hearts are empty; fill them with your divine presence. Lord Jesus, our hearts are yours; possess them always and only for yourself. Breathe in me O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy. Act in me O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy. Draw my heart O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy. Strengthen me O

Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy. Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy. Amen.<sup>48</sup>

There are times when no matter how mature or how well we are, a loss can and will take us to that place of becoming unglued. Our culture is not comfortable with intense emotional responses. Trusting that the pain will not remain this intense helps it to become bearable. Let people who love and know you well share in your process. To quote Thomas Horn, "Grief, no matter where it comes from, can only be resolved by connecting with other people."<sup>49</sup>

When we lose someone or something we are not only cut off from that someone or something, but it also cuts off the part of me that the other represented.<sup>50</sup> We have lost a part of our self. It is in finding our way back to that missing part of the self and reclaiming it from the person or thing now gone, that is the process of grieving. Grieving is a process, and the process is lifesaving. Grieving well is to discover the nature of our losses, as well as their meanings and the impact of the feelings within ourselves. This is the time to find appropriate ways of responding. Really, there are no shortcuts.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Association of the Miraculous Medal Prayer, "Saint Augustine," Association of the Miraculous Medal Prayer, <https://www.amm.org/PrayWithUs/St%20Augustine.aspx>.

<sup>49</sup> Association of the Miraculous Medal Prayer, "Saint Augustine," <https://www.amm.org/PrayWithUs/St%20Augustine.aspx>.

<sup>50</sup> Teesie Vallero, "Healing from Grief," Hazelden Betty Ford, <https://www.hazeldenbettyford.org/articles/vallero/healing-from-grief>.

<sup>51</sup> Vallero, "Healing from Grief," <https://www.hazeldenbettyford.org/articles/vallero/healing-from-grief>.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

The context for this theological writing is the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and how it deals with grief. The problem is that there is not a grief support system to address my parishioners' grief. The hypothesis is that if the grief awareness program is implemented, then the leaders will be equipped to provide pastoral care to those who are grieving. As Christians we are told and promised that although weeping may endure for a night, joy will eventually come in the morning. However, we are never told how long that night will be or how long our season of grief may last until morning will come. So, our theology and our faith will shape us for that joyful morning.<sup>1</sup>

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church has a rather large majority of African Americans. One of the characteristics of grieving African American families is the restraint that is put on the grieving process outside of the family unit. In my opinion, grieving among African Americans is complex because of their need to keep everything private, the complexities of the family structures in some cases, and the dependency on the church as an extended family unit. Even though the church has historically been a place that has provided an all-rounded care for the African American, the church is not equipped to deal with grieving congregants in a manner that allows the healing process to take its natural course.

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<sup>1</sup> Yolanda Pierce, "A Theology for a Grieving People," *Sojourners*, last modified August 10, 2015, <https://sojo.net/articles/how-blacklivesmatter-changed-my-theology/theology-grieving-people>.

This chapter is going to examine this phenomenon of grief in the African American church from a theological standpoint in the face of Liberation Theology. Liberation Theology is important to this project because of the restricted form of grieving that needs to be transformed into a liberated process that allows the African American to grieve freely and properly. The obstacles, hindrances, and restrictions that have historically curbed this type of proper grieving needs a release. Liberation Theology provides that needed analysis and reason to bring a person into a place where they are free to grieve.

### **Grief and African Americans**

Grief is a phenomenon that is experienced by all when a loved one is lost. Neimeyer explains the process of grief:

Viewed from a constructivist perspective, grieving is a process of reconstructing a world of meaning that has been challenged by loss. Although most people successfully navigate bereavement and retain or return to pre-loss levels of functioning, a significant proportion struggle with protracted grief, and are unable to find meaning in the wake of an unsought transition.<sup>2</sup>

Neimeyer draws attention to the part of grieving that tries to reconstruct one's world before the tragedy happened. In some cases, he notes that some can return to pre-loss levels of function. In other cases, which he also notes as a significant proportion of the population, that reconstruction is "not always successful and the bereaved fights to make meaning of life in the wake of a loss."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Robert A. Neimeyer et al., "Grief Therapy and the Reconstruction of Meaning: From Principles to Practice," Hospice Whispers, <http://hospicewhispers.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/NiemeyerGriefTheory.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Anna Laurie and Robert A. Neimeyer, "African Americans in Bereavement: Grief as a Function of Ethnicity," *Omega (Westport)* 57, no. 2 (2008): 57, <https://doi.org/10.2190/0m.57.2.d>.

Neimeyer examined the grief process within various ethnic groups, acknowledging that not many studies were available on the subject. He conducted a brief study in order to examine the African American grief experience, “with particular emphasis on issues of identity change, interpersonal dimensions of the loss, and continuing attachments with the deceased.”<sup>4</sup> This study consisted of bereaved college students out of which 940 were Caucasians and 641 were African Americans. He had each participant complete questionnaires on Inventory of Complicated Grief-Revised, the Continuing Bonds Scale, and had them answer questions regarding the circumstances surrounding his or her loss. Here is a summary of his findings:

Results revealed that African Americans experienced more frequent bereavement by homicide, maintenance of a stronger continuing bond with the deceased, greater grief for the loss of extended kin beyond the immediate family, and a sense of support in their grief, despite their tendency to talk less with others about the loss or seek professional support for it. Overall, African Americans reported higher levels of complicated grief symptoms than Caucasians, especially when they spent less time speaking to others about their loss experience.<sup>5</sup>

The results from Neimeyer’s study reveal a few items that are necessary when examining the theology of grieving amongst African Americans. The first item of interest is the fact that African Americans experience more frequent bereavement due to homicide and other violence related crimes. This means that the grieving is more frequent and is more difficult because of the circumstances. Any theology that deals with this will have to take into consideration this fact. The second item of interest is to acknowledgement that African Americans maintain a stronger continuing bond with the deceased. This means

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<sup>4</sup> Laurie and Neimeyer, “African Americans in Bereavement,” 57, <https://doi.org/10.2190/0m.57.2.d>.

<sup>5</sup> Laurie and Neimeyer, “African Americans in Bereavement,” 57, <https://doi.org/10.2190/0m.57.2.d>.

that the deceased still lives on strongly in the hearts of those that he or she left behind. At times the deceased is even spoken of as if they were still alive and their desires, considerations, and wishes are fulfilled in a manner as if they are present.

Again, theological perspectives must take this fact into consideration. The third item of interest from the findings of this study is that African Americans also experience greater grief for the loss family members outside the nuclear unit. This would include grieving extensively for cousins, aunties, uncles, and so on. This is due to the fact that the African American family is usually not just a nuclear family unit but operates mainly as an extended family unit where different family members are considered part of the nuclear family. Cousins could be easily mistaken for siblings, and aunties and uncles for parents and grandparents. This also makes the grieving process more extensive because the loss is felt as if it was an immediate family member. This extended family system creates an informal support group, which the study notes as a support system in the time of grieving.

This is an important point, considering that one of the themes of this chapter is based on my observation that African Americans do not grieve properly. The grieving process is supported by this family system described, with very little talk outside of the family system established. Yet, even though grieving is not taken outside of the family home, and not talked about outside of the family home as compared with Caucasians, African Americans believe that they have the grief support they need from the large extended family system. Marissa Evans, in her *Relentlessness of Black Grief* paints a picture when she feels COVID-19 denied the African American bereaved of experiencing this extended family grieving process:

And now, because of COVID-19, we cannot even grieve together, lest we risk passing the virus to others. Losing the Black experience of mourning at homegoing's – the tears, the singing, the foil-covered take-home plates of food, the celebration of a loved one getting their ancestral wings – denies us the chance to start healing when we need one another the most.<sup>6</sup>

Neimeyer concludes that the African American, due to the issues identified from the study, experienced higher levels of grief symptoms.

Before examining Liberation Theology and the bereaved African American, it will be beneficial to examine some characteristics of the relationship of African Americans to the church. Avent and Cashwell's study illuminated some characteristics in their book *The Black Church* which we will examine.<sup>7</sup> The first important point they note is that about 80% of African Americans identify religion as important compared to only 50% of the general population. Next, they note that a majority of African Americans identify as Christian, with 50% of African Americans attending church service on a weekly basis. Avent and Cashwell report from their research that the majority of African Americans attend a predominantly African American church. They also found that:

Many African Americans identify God as a core aspect of their coping and rely on their religion and spirituality during difficult life transitions (Bell-Tolliver & Wilkerson, 2011; Whitley, 2012)." Additionally, African Americans assert that attending worship services and Bible study, being involved in their churches, having devotion time, and listening to religious sermons and gospel music allow them to conceptualize their struggles within the larger struggle between good and evil, or God and the devil (Whitley, 2012).<sup>8</sup>

These factors, Avent and Cashwell conclude, make it important for professional counselors to have ample knowledge of the African American's connection to religion in

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<sup>6</sup> Marissa Evans, "The Relentlessness of Black Grief," *The Atlantic*, September 27, 2020, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/the-relentlessness-of-black-grief/ar-BB19tdSu>.

<sup>7</sup> Janeé R. Avent and Craig S. Cashwell, "The Black Church: Theology and Implications for Counseling African Americans," *The Professional Counselor* 5 (2015), <https://tpcjourn.al/nbcc.org/>.

<sup>8</sup> Avent and Cashwell, "The Black Church," <https://tpcjourn.al/nbcc.org/>.

the face of psychological analysis and help. They further note that African Americans do not usually seek professional help, but rather seek their spiritual leaders for their mental health needs. They accurately depict the African American church when they write:

The Black Church is the term used in popular culture and scholarly literature to refer to the overall institution that encompasses individual, predominantly African American Christian congregations (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). In order to understand the Black Church and the people who worship therein, counselors must familiarize themselves with the historical context and theological underpinnings that frame the Black Church and likely influence individual parishioners' help-seeking behaviors.<sup>9</sup>

### **Dr. Cone and Liberation Theology**

Dr. James Cone is the founder of Liberation Theology, and his intake and input of the African American church and community at large, and how they grieve bears importance to this research. It is fair to surmise Dr. Cone's view, which will be detailed in the following sections, to be that the African American grieving should be done beyond "the living room, beyond the concept of what happens in my house stays in my house, beyond talking to the pastor. He believes that it is okay to seek professional help and counselling."<sup>10</sup>

Avent and Cashwell concur with Dr. McBeth when they write that they believe that James Cone's Liberation Theology is one of the principal theological areas of study within the African American church. It looks at God from the African American "perspective as adapted to the scriptures, rather than the traditionally accepted "White

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<sup>9</sup> Avent and Cashwell, "The Black Church," <https://tpcjourn.al/nbcc.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> Avent and Cashwell, "The Black Church," <https://tpcjourn.al/nbcc.org/>.

man's version.”<sup>11</sup> Liberation Theology, according to Avent and Cashwell, is seen as a comprehensive theology because of how it considers individuals' view of God, and how they interact with each other. They report:

According to liberation theology, the Black Church offered oppressed Blacks a sense of freedom rarely experienced in their day-to-day lives. The Black Church was a place where African Americans had the opportunity to gather and vent about their problems as a community. Additionally, the Black Church was a place where change could be created and enacted (McBeth, 1981). While other theologies focus on Caucasians as oppressors, churches whose members ascribe to liberation theology tend to focus less on the oppression and more on the freedom that is felt when congregation members experience fellowship with one another (Burrow, 1994).<sup>12</sup>

In a look at Liberation Theology in *Down by the Riverside*, Dr. Cone gives an historical account that connects the development of civil rights, Black Power, with Black Theology.<sup>13</sup> According to Cone, there had come a time when the faith of young African American preachers was closer to Martin Luther King Jr's, but their politics were aligned with Stokley Carmichael of the SNCC (Student nonviolent Coordinating Committee). This conflict caused the African Americans to reflect on how the gospel could be reconciled with the politics. Cone says. “In an effort to resolve the conflict, they began to reflect on how the gospel can be reconciled with the Black Power politics of liberation, especially as articulated by young Black radicals who claimed that Blacks should take their freedom ‘by any means necessary.’”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Avent and Cashwell, “The Black Church,” <https://tpcjourn.al/nbcc.org/>.

<sup>12</sup> Avent and Cashwell, “The Black Church,” <https://tpcjourn.al/nbcc.org/>.

<sup>13</sup> James Cone, *Down by the Riverside: Readings in African American Religion* (Manhattan, NY: NYU Press, 2000), 398.

<sup>14</sup> Cone, *Down by the Riverside*, 398.

The school of thought concerning King, along with White theologians, was that Christianity was identical with love and love was connected to resolution through nonviolence and integration. Within such a school of thought, how could African Americans retain their Christian identity within those definitions but also support the Black Power effort of regaining their freedom? Christianity was in essence being called the “White man's religion.” Additionally, Black preachers in resolving the tension between maintaining their Christian identity and supporting Black Power, had to develop a theological perspective that was both Black and accountable to the African American faith. Cone notes that it is within this backdrop that Albert Cleage released *Black Messiah* and he (Cone) wrote *Black Theology and Black Power*.<sup>15</sup> Later on, Wilmore was introduced. Cone states:

What we needed was a well written, comprehensive, and scholarly history of the Black Church and religion that could meet the test of both critical historical scholarship and also be useful in our attempt to develop Black Theology. Gayraud Wilmore responded to that need by writing his black religion and black radicalism (1972). This text is one of the most important contributions emerging out of the black theology movement.<sup>16</sup>

The transformative aspect of Wilmore's work was his cause to seek a theology that was Black and went to the scriptures instead of Westernized theology for his source. Cone concurs that the African American was eventually driven to scripture to analyze its message in light of the struggle for freedom. This was not seen in classic western theology, which forced the African American theologians to relate the scriptures with their struggles for freedom. What was the dominant theme of scripture and how did that relate to the Black struggle for freedom? That “if God sided with the poor and the weak

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<sup>15</sup> Cone, *Down by the Riverside*, 398.

<sup>16</sup> Cone, *Down by the Riverside*, 394.

in biblical times, then why not today? If salvation is a historical event of rescue, why not a deliverance of Blacks from White American racial oppression?”<sup>17</sup> Being strongly influenced by Bishop “Henry M. Turner’s “God is a Negro” claim, and Countee Cullen’s *The Black Christ*, Cone describes the importance of the development of “Jesus is Black” and the symbolic meaning of that affirmation.”<sup>18</sup> This was a turnaround in Black Theology. This Jesus was the true liberator, who stood to liberate the African American from the oppression experience also. In Cone’s words:

The blackness of Jesus had definite political implications that we derived from the New Testament witness. It was a way of saying that his cross and resurrection represented God’s solidarity with the oppressed in their struggle for liberation. The oppressed did not have to accept at present misery as the final definition of their humanity. The good news is: God, the holy one of Israel, has entered the human situation in Jesus and has transformed it through his cross and resurrection. The poor no longer have to remain in poverty. They are now free to fight for their freedom, because God is fighting with them. In the United States this claim meant that God was on the side of oppressed blacks in their struggle for freedom and against whites who victimized them. For black clergy radicals, the best way to describe that insight was to say that “Jesus is black.”<sup>19</sup>

Cone also remarked that, “Black theologians merely wanted to emphasize the theological significance of Jesus in the context of the Black liberation struggle in the United States.”<sup>20</sup> Though Liberation Theology focused on liberation from racism, its effects travel through the African American experience in many avenues such as spirituality, grieving, socialization, and many other avenues. Just as oppression from racism was identified by the African American, and relief sought from it through a theological

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<sup>17</sup> Cone, *Down by the Riverside*, 397.

<sup>18</sup> Cone, *Down by the Riverside*, 398.

<sup>19</sup> Cone, *Down by the Riverside*, 398.

<sup>20</sup> Cone, *Down by the Riverside*, 392.

perspective, grief was also identified to be a mechanism experiencing oppression and requiring liberation.

African American grief needed a theological perspective where the God of the African American carved a way in the midst of loss being due to homicides, injustice, and suffering, bringing freedom to mourn both the means of the loss as well as the loss itself. It is a theological perspective that embraces a God that can bring one through extreme pain during oppression, and to help the bereaved find meaning to life again. This theological perspective can identify with a Christ who was near to the poor and unfavored, a Christ who died from homicide and is able to give comfort. The comfort received from Christ, who after his agony is now seated on the right hand of God, the Father, encourages the African American that they can function again after a grievous event, and function at a level that is as successful as their pre-loss level.

This brings up the issue of providing support that would enable the African American to successfully experience the grieving process. This would include professional therapy. Black families perceive that receiving therapy means that you are crazy, and sometimes fear the reaction from extended family members, friends, and community. Black families often fail to seek treatment on their own, but schools, courts, hospitals, or social services agencies normally send them for treatment. Black families believe in keeping their family business within the family and families do not air dirty laundry in public to bring disgrace or humiliation to the family name. Boyd-Franklin continues and writes:

Clearly, families of all cultures have secrets. However, because of the legacy of mistrust there are many issues that black families have learned to label as nobody business but our own. Black families are often concerned about the judgement imposed on them by outside agency and may therefore be sensitive about

discussing with outsider such as issues as the fact that children may have different fathers. The type of secret that is kept from certain members within the family is the more toxic and difficult to explore.<sup>21</sup>

This issue of privacy when grieving is what prevents the African American from reaching out for professional help. As mentioned earlier, the church, which serves as an extension of the family unit is forced to offer grief support in addition to the many ways that it serves the community. This makes the theological perspective of the church, especially Cone's liberating theology necessary. Camden Morgante, in her article "Spirituality with African-American Couples," writes that:

For many African Americans, the church is an extended family and the minister has central authority role in their lives. Historically, the Black church was the first institution that belonged exclusively to African-Americans, and allowed them to emphasize aspects of Christianity that were unique to their cultural legacy (Cook & Wiley, 2000). The institution of the church serves as a coping mechanism in handling the pain of racism and discrimination, assists in coordinating social justice efforts and provides a place to survive and deal with painful life experiences (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). The African-American church often plays a central role in the lives of many of its members, providing spiritual refuge, counseling, and social activities.<sup>22</sup>

This not only describes the dependence on the church institution but the reliance on the church to survive the cause of the loss as well as the loss itself. Morgante goes further to say that "Black churches have become "multifunctional community institutions" that provide social activities, schools, political activities, and positive role models for young people. These programs address the economic, education, and emotional health of community members."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Nancy Boyd-Franklin, *Black Families in Therapy: A Multisystem Approach* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1989), 21.

<sup>22</sup> Camden Morgante, "Spirituality with African-American Couples," The Hope Couples Project, [https://www.hopecouples.com/resources/Strategies\\_for\\_African\\_American\\_Spirituality.pdf](https://www.hopecouples.com/resources/Strategies_for_African_American_Spirituality.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Morgante, "Spirituality with African-American Couples," [https://www.hopecouples.com/resources/Strategies\\_for\\_African\\_American\\_Spirituality.pdf](https://www.hopecouples.com/resources/Strategies_for_African_American_Spirituality.pdf).

Morgante goes on to explain that within these church structures, African Americans display their talents and abilities and feel respected as these abilities are recognized, even achieving the status of deacon and other leadership titles, providing an avenue of leadership experience.<sup>24</sup> Outside of the church, they may not have these opportunities to exercise leadership. This is seen in Jarvis Tyner's description of this experience in *African-American Struggles are Key in the Fight for Progress*, when he writes that: "centrality of the struggle of black people is rooted in a culture of struggle and resistance that made it possible to survive the horrors of human bondage and ninety years of Jim Crow, extreme poverty, genocidal racist violence and economic terror."<sup>25</sup>

Returning to the subject of professional help during a time of grieving, one way that this can be achieved is through counseling. The African American, however, needs to be liberated from the point of view that going to a counsellor means you are crazy. It is necessary to have a theological perspective of a liberating God, who uses vessels such as therapists and counsellors to help with the grieving process. Tashika Holloway, in her article, *Therapists and Counselors* says, "Counseling is a "foreign" concept and viewed as a "last resort" in the Black community; however, times are changing, and many Black men and women are now finding refuge in therapy."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Morgante, "Spirituality with African-American Couples," [https://www.hopecouples.com/resources/Strategies\\_for\\_African\\_American\\_Spirituality.pdf](https://www.hopecouples.com/resources/Strategies_for_African_American_Spirituality.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> Jarvis Tyner, "African-American Struggles are Key in the Fight for Progress," Communist Party USA, last modified May 1, 2016, [https://www.cpusa.org/party\\_voices/african-american-struggles-are-key-in-the-fight-for-progress/](https://www.cpusa.org/party_voices/african-american-struggles-are-key-in-the-fight-for-progress/).

<sup>26</sup> Tashika Holloway, "Therapists and Counselors: Here's How You Can Best Help Your Black Clientele," Thriveworks, last modified May 30, 2018, <https://thriveworks.com/blog/therapists-counselors-best-help-african-american-clientele/>.

Holloway suggests ways to encourage this process, including explaining the benefits of such counselling sessions to the client. She also suggests explaining that counseling is not a sign of weakness, since many times African Americans are advised to “toughen up” and deal with issues. She further advises counselors of African American clients to consciously develop a solution-focused approach, and to place deeper emphasis on psychoeducation. A third key she advises is to continually provide an avenue of support to the clientele in overcoming the stigma of counseling. Finally, she advocates counselors to develop a strong relationship or connection from the beginning.<sup>27</sup> This could be due to the fact that African Americans have relationships that extend outside the family nuclear unit and relate in such a manner. The counsellor must fit into the role of the extended family, where trust is released, or they may find that the clients do not return because they simply do not “feel” the counselor.

### **Complexities of African American Grieving**

Yolanda Pierce, in her *Sojourners* article states that:

The Christian is promised that although weeping may endure for a night, joy will eventually come in the morning. But we are never told how long that night will be or how long our season of grief may last. Your theology and your faith are shaped as much by those seasons of grief as they are by glimpses of a joyful morning.<sup>28</sup>

This shaping of theology in the face of African American grieving, brings out the complexities that are unique to the African American community. In a previous section, we saw issues that must be dealt with as laid out by Neimeyer peculiar to African

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<sup>27</sup> Holloway, “Therapists and Counselors,” <https://thriveworks.com/blog/therapists-counselors-best-help-african-american-clientele/>.

<sup>28</sup> Yolanda Pierce, “A Theology for a Grieving People,” *Sojourners*, last modified August 10, 2015, <https://sojo.net/articles/how-blacklivesmatter-changed-my-theology/theology-grieving-people>.

American grief. In this section we will look at some of these issues and how to connect these complexities with the Liberation Theology perspective.

The first issue is identified by Yolanda Pierce when she notes: “There is a heavy weight of being Black in a world that hates Black existence. And my tears came from no longer being able to contain my anger, rage, or grief in a series of polite conversations and academic panels.”<sup>29</sup> This tackles the hard subject of racism while dealing with grief and how to view it within theological contexts. The grief of the loss is compounded by the hatred and injustice experienced, in the shadowed whispers of “love” and “Christianity.” This expounds the grief. Pierce goes on to state that the Cross, after all is a place of grief, where tears were shed for the beloved Jesus. Jesus was executed, and left behind loved ones who shed many tears, bringing to light a theology of grief, which Pierce relates to as she says, “a theology that reminds us that Black lives matter.”<sup>30</sup>

This leads to a second issue, which is the need for “space” to grieve. Pierce describes this when she says:

This theology must make room for tears, weeping, wailing, pain, and anger. Spaces are necessary where one can grieve without shame or interference. African Americans are often rushed – by cultural, political, and theological forces – to quickly forgive those who trespass against us. We are rushed to the space of forgiveness and healing before we can even bury the dead or evaluate the scope of our loss.<sup>31</sup>

She is not saying that forgiveness should not take place but is highlighting the fact that no one should be forced to rush into forgiving when they are already dealing with the many

<sup>29</sup> Pierce, “A Theology for a Grieving People,” <https://sojo.net/articles/how-blacklivesmatter-changed-my-theology/theology-grieving-people>.

<sup>30</sup> Pierce, “A Theology for a Grieving People,” <https://sojo.net/articles/how-blacklivesmatter-changed-my-theology/theology-grieving-people>.

<sup>31</sup> Pierce, “A Theology for a Grieving People,” <https://sojo.net/articles/how-blacklivesmatter-changed-my-theology/theology-grieving-people>.

stages of grief in addition to the loss of a loved one. She brings in the cross of Christ again noting that one cannot quickly rush to the Resurrection Sunday, but must experience the pain of Good Friday's execution, the shock and silence of Holy Saturday before arriving at Resurrection Sunday. In the communities of the African American, this same space must be granted to the bereaved to experience the pain, anger, injustice, shock, and silence, and not forced to rush the process. This tends to hurt the grieving process rather than help it. The liberating Christ, can walk with the bereaved through the stages of the grieving journey, bringing relief in freedom to mourn with space.<sup>32</sup>

The third issue is the layers of inter-relational challenges that need to be dealt with while grieving. There are a lot of family dynamics that come into play within the family unit of the African American community. As Boyd-Franklin referenced earlier: "issues such as the fact that children may have different fathers. The type of secret that is kept from certain members within the family [making it] more toxic and difficult to explore."<sup>33</sup> These family secrets and sometimes complicated relationships make the grieving process more laborious when one must come to terms with the exposure of an unknown layer of relationship in addition to the loss. Katherine Nordal states that: "If your relationship with the deceased was difficult, this will also add another dimension to the grieving process. It may take some time and thought before you are able to look back on the relationship and adjust to the loss."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Pierce, "A Theology for a Grieving People," <https://sojo.net/articles/how-blacklivesmatter-changed-my-theology/theology-grieving-people>.

<sup>33</sup> Boyd-Franklin, *Black Families in Therapy*, 21.

<sup>34</sup> Katherine C. Nordal, "Grief: Coping with the Loss of Your Loved One," American Psychological Association, last modified January 1, 2020, <https://www.apa.org/topics/grief>.

In conclusion of this section, there are two thoughts to consider when looking at grieving from a Liberation Theology viewpoint. The first is that of hope, and the second is that healing comes with time. Tim Challies, in his work *How to Grieve Like a Christian*, writes that: “There is a way that Christians must grieve. What is that way? Grieve hopefully. When Paul says, “you may not grieve as others do who have no hope” he is really saying something like, “we grieve, but not in the same way as all those other people who have no hope.”<sup>35</sup>

There is a hope that Christians have, which is that we will see our loved once again in him. In quoting Apostle Paul, Challies reiterates the point that we do not grieve as people who have no hope, but as those who do. Liberation in grieving allows the African American to allow the pain, anger, rage, and “sorrow to run its course, lay it at the cross, and then turn to the hope found in the same cross to keep moving on.”<sup>36</sup>

Concerning time, the healer, Katherine C. Nordal notes that even though coping with the loss of a loved “one can be a momentous challenge, the sadness diminishes with time even through the grieving process.”<sup>37</sup> She notes that: Research shows that most people can recover from loss on their own through the passage of time if they have social support and healthy habits. It may take months or a year to come to terms with a loss. There is no “normal” time period for someone to grieve.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Tim Challies, “How to Grieve Like a Christian,” Challies, last modified September 10, 2017, <https://www.challies.com/articles/how-christians-grieve>.

<sup>36</sup> Challies, “How to Grieve Like a Christian,” <https://www.challies.com/articles/how-christians-grieve>.

<sup>37</sup> Katherine C. Nordal, “Grief: Coping with the Loss of Your Loved One,” American Psychological Association, last modified January 1, 2020, <https://www.apa.org/topics/grief>.

<sup>38</sup> Nordal, “Grief,” <https://www.apa.org/topics/grief>.

One should be liberated to grieve and reach out for professional help to aid the grieving process. Weeping may last for a night according to the scriptures, letting us know that there is a season or a period that mourning lasts. Joy does come in the morning, though the timing between “night” and “morning” is different for everyone.

### **Conclusion**

To reiterate the focus of this project, it is that if I implement the grief awareness program, then the leaders will be equipped to provide pastoral care to those who are grieving. In this chapter, we have examined the role that the church plays in the life of the grieving African American and, therefore, the role it plays as a support system for the bereaved. Even though this is the case, not many churches are equipped to support bereaved ones. This is due in part to the reshaping of the theological perspective as well as the need to direct a bereaved one to seek professional help. We reviewed Liberation Theology and its potential to unlock the issues that complicate African American grieving.

One must be granted the space, the time, and even the professional help to grieve and liberated from mindsets that have restricted grieving in the African American community. Joy does come in the morning.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS**

This chapter will examine a non-religious discipline connected with the subject of grief. The hypothesis is that if a grief awareness program is implemented, then the leaders will be equipped to provide pastoral care to those who are grieving. So far, the subject has been examined from a religious point of view. This chapter examines the discipline of psychology and how it impacts this project concerning the lack of grief counseling in the church. For many years, it seems like most psychologists tried to stay clear of religion and spirituality in their clinical practice. It was probably because there was some history of religious antipathy among early psychology leaders such as Sigmund Freud and B.F. Skinner, or because psychologists generally lack training in this area of their field. Psychologists are now developing and evaluating a variety of spiritually integrated approaches to grief. In the past, grief has been relegated to religious entities to see the bereaved individual through.

The need for clinical counseling has become more important as psychological therapy in general has become more accepted, with results that are tangible. The discipline of psychology according to the Oxford Encyclopedia on psychology, is a scientific discipline of the study of the mind and behavior.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will therefore

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<sup>1</sup> James H. Capshew, “Psychology,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the History of American Science, Medicine, and Technology*, ed. Hugh Richard Slotten (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2014), 99-100.

examine grief in light of scientific studies of the mind and behavior. As with such disciplines, there are various theories that are propagated within the discipline. One theory that will be focused on in this chapter is the theory of grief, first postulated by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939).

Freud was a neurologist from Austria who developed psychoanalysis, which is known to be the method by which a therapist “unpacks unconscious conflicts based on the free associations, dreams and fantasies of the patient.”<sup>2</sup> Freud, believed that grief was a necessary process to go through after losing a loved one to death.<sup>3</sup> He outlined certain mourning activities, which will be detailed in the sections following, which would eventually lead to healing, which he termed “grief work.” “This theory of grief became a foundation upon which many other theories were formed, but Freud remains one of the early as well as dominant names that focused on grief as its own subject matter.”<sup>4</sup>

The problem this project is trying to address is how to implement a grief awareness program that will equip leaders to provide care to those who are grieving. A working solution is to combine spiritual care and grief theory therapy principles found within the discipline of psychology, that will help an individual through the grieving process until they return to pre-grieving levels of operation.

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<sup>2</sup> Biography.com, “Sigmund Freud,” Biography.com, <https://www.biography.com/scholar/sigmund-freud>.

<sup>3</sup> J. William Worden, *Death, Dying, and Bereavement: Contemporary Perspectives, Institutions, and Practices* (New York, NY: Springer Publishing Co., 2014), 91.

<sup>4</sup> Worden, *Death, Dying, and Bereavement*, 91.

## Theory of Grief

### *Appeal for Non-Religious Grief Aid*

Clarissa Moll succinctly makes a point when she writes that many people find it difficult to return to church when grieving. She lists possible reasons for this. One of the reasons, she mentions, is that the uplifting nature of some services are too abrasive for some in the solemnity of their grief. Another is the fact that some churches are not equipped to deal with the grieving process. Not to leave out the fact that some bereaved find it difficult to fit into a community where they used to be known as a different person before affected by the death of a loved one. These reasons present an opportunity for a non-church institution to aide in the grieving process. Moll does include some suggestions that churches could incorporate to help with the grieving process. These include integrating lament in worship, developing remembrance rituals, training more ministry leaders to be “grief-aware,” preparing to offer practical care such as meals, handywork and so on, considering death in order to lead one to die well in the face of impending death and the Christian view, and finally, making space for mourning.<sup>5</sup>

As Dr. T. Francis mentioned in his book, “Pastors can and must participate with their parishioners in their struggle to remain whole. The relationship must be grounded in the affirmation of person’s worth in being a member of God’s world, accented by his or her desire and work to gain self-understanding.”<sup>6</sup> This is a real need in churches, even

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<sup>5</sup> Clarissa Moll, “Letting Grief Come to Church,” Christianity Today, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2020/may-web-exclusives/letting-grief-come-to-church.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Francis, *I Watched Them Die and Dying Lives Matter* (Atlanta, GA: TFran Publishing, 2016), 53.

though it does not mean that churches are adequately furnished with leaders that can provide this level of care. In my opinion, there is an opportunity within churches for leaders to embrace both the spiritual care and clinical care to aid the bereaved through the grieving process. The next section will examine some principles of Sigmund Freud's grief theory that can help the grieving process once a pastoral care giver embraces these concepts.

Janice Geneyro notes that "the theoretical materials from sociology, leadership, business, anthropology, psychology roles to understand the role of grief. Grief as a psychological concept, and grieving as a reaction to the loss of someone who has died, are different entities."<sup>7</sup> She defines the words that would be used in these writings such as "grieving" which she refers to the experience of a person who is reacting to the death of a lost loved one. She also quotes a definition of "bereavement" to be "the loss of a loved one by death, and grief refers to the distress resulting from bereavement."<sup>8</sup> These definitions will be maintained in this research to keep the universal meanings constant.

### *Freud's Theory of Grief*

Sigmund Freud, the Austrian neurologist is known to be one of the first and major contributors to the theory of grief. In his theory according to the work "An Essay on Loss and Grief,"<sup>9</sup> (referred to subsequently as "The Essay"), the bereaved individual was

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<sup>7</sup> Janice Geneyro, Tracy Marshall, and Tess Miller, "Report on Bereavement and Grief Research," National Library of Medicine, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15317140/>.

<sup>8</sup> Geneyro, Marshall, and Miller, "Report on Bereavement and Grief Research," <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15317140/>.

<sup>9</sup> Nursing Answers, "An Essay on Loss and Grief," NursingAnswers.net, last modified December 15, 2020, <https://nursinganswers.net/essays/experiences-of-loss-and-grief-case-study.php>.

searching for an attachment that was lost. He believed that the therapist's work was to aid in breaking the bonds that linked the bereaved to the deceased. In this process he identified three aspects of breaking this bond. First, freeing the bereaved from the bondage to the deceased, second, readjustment of the bereaved life without the deceased, and third, building new relationships.<sup>10</sup> Worden, in *Death, Dying and Bereavement* also echoes Freud's theory when he writes that Freud regarded mourning as a process that enabled the bereaved to test the reality of their loss. Within this process of mourning, Freud believed that there was an emotional withdrawal from one's bond or attachment to the lost one, termed "decathexis."<sup>11</sup>

Worden goes on to say that Freud believed that grief was resolved when the emotional detachment from the deceased was complete, and the emotional energy could now be invested in a new relationship and even in new activities. These were the steps that he termed "grief work" that birthed the theory.<sup>12</sup> The "Essay on Loss and Grief" notes that even though there were detractors against this theory, Freud maintained that the grieving experience required that the bereaved had to necessarily go through the expressions of grief, which confronted their pain such as guilt and anger which was an acknowledgement of their separation from their loved one. Freud postulated that if this expression was not released in full, it would end up compromising the recovery process.

It is this influence of Freud to move on in the recovery process that birthed Kubler-Ross's (1969) stages of grief, that includes shock and denial, anger, resentment and guilt,

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<sup>10</sup> Nursing Answers, "An Essay on Loss and Grief," <https://nursinganswers.net/essays/experiences-of-loss-and-grief-case-study.php>.

<sup>11</sup> Worden, *Death, Dying, and Bereavement*, 91.

<sup>12</sup> Worden, *Death, Dying, and Bereavement*, 91.

bargaining, and the depression and acceptance.<sup>13</sup> The essay further notes that more detractors rose up, arguing against the concept of neat stages that one must go through, giving hope of a clean road of healing. This is mainly because grieving is also postulated to involve complex, diverse, and multi-faceted characteristics that all bereaved cannot easily fit into as the stages offer. There are also factors that were brought up over time to include the role of aspects such as “physical, psychological, social and cultural and spiritual needs that impact on the bereaved people, their families and intimate networks” as the essay mentions.<sup>14</sup> The detractors also criticized the lack of empirical evidence.

In spite of the arguments of the detractors, there are many helpful theories that have been built upon Freud’s theory of grief, as noted in the essay:

Despite these criticisms, early-stage theories have provided great groundwork and influence on current theories such as the Dual-Processing theory developed by Stroebe and Schut (1999) and Worden (2008). Hall (2014) argues that “these theories take account of many of the risks and protective factors identified by research and provide an important context for appreciating the idiosyncratic nature of attachment to the deceased that is lacking in the earlier stage theories”. Both models provide frameworks that guide intervention. Richardson and Balaswamy (2001), when evaluating the Dual Processing Model, suggested that avoiding grief can have both positive and negative outcomes. They proposed that this is where bereavement is perceived as including Loss of Orientation and Restoration Orientation. The griever in the loss-orientation is preoccupied with emotions, yearning and ruminating about the deceased, whereas, restoration orientation involves taking over the responsibilities and the roles undertaken by the deceased and making lifestyle changes, setting up a new identity without the deceased (Richardson, 2007; Bennett, 2010a).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, “The Five Stage of Grief,” Psycom, <https://www.psycom.net/depression.central.grief.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Nursing Answers, “An Essay on Loss and Grief,” <https://nursinganswers.net/essays/experiences-of-loss-and-grief-case-study.php>.

<sup>15</sup> Nursing Answers, “An Essay on Loss and Grief,” <https://nursinganswers.net/essays/experiences-of-loss-and-grief-case-study.php>.

In addition to the aforementioned, the essay further mentions William Worden's theory based on Freud's initial work, which he believes to involve tasks that are similar to the ones that Freud outlined. Worden believes first there is the task of accepting the reality of loss, then processing the pain of grief, adjusting to a world without the lost one. Worden takes it a step further where he notes that it is important to understand that client through seven determinants. These include who the deceased was, the nature of the attachment the bereaved had to the "deceased, how the person died, historical antecedents, personality variables, social mediators, and concurrent stressors."<sup>16</sup>

Granek also writes that in the *History of Psychology Journal* that grief within the psychology discipline is "cutting-edge."<sup>17</sup> Granek traced the evolution of grief within the discipline of psychology to what it is within the tenets of modern science today. He goes on to note that contemporary tenets constitute rationality, reason, observation, and a belief in continued progress as outlined by Kenneth J Gergen. Granek writes:

Modern life emphasizes goal directedness, functionality, rationality, and efficiency in all areas of living (Gergen, 1991, 1992). Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, and Stroebe (1992) wrote that when applied to grief, the modernist paradigm suggests that people need to recover from their state of intense emotionality and return to normal functioning and effectiveness as quickly and efficiently as possible. Modernist theories of grief and related therapeutic interventions encourage people who have experienced loss to respond in just this way. Grieving, a debilitating emotional response, is seen as a troublesome interference with daily routines, and should be "worked through." Such grief work typically consists of a number of tasks that have to be confronted and systematically attended to before normality is reinstated. Reducing attention to the loss is critical, and good adjustment is often viewed as breaking of ties between the bereaved and the dead (Stroebe et al. 1992, p. 1206).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Worden, *Death, Dying, and Bereavement*, 94.

<sup>17</sup> Leeat Granek, "Grief as Pathology: The Evolution of Grief Theory in Psychology from Freud to the Present," *History of Psychology* 13, no. 1 (February 2010), ProQuest, <http://dx.doi.org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/a0016991>.

<sup>18</sup> Granek, "Grief as Pathology," <http://dx.doi.org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/a0016991>.

Granek's writing, like many other more recent grief theorists echoes Freud's "grief work." His goal, in a similar fashion is to get people functioning and back to work in a timely and cost-efficient manner.<sup>19</sup>

One more thing that Freud refers to in his work on grief is the difference between grieving and depression. This is found in his book *Mourning and Melancholia*. Worden notes that many of Freud's patients presented grief symptoms that resembled that of depression. Freud acknowledged that the symptoms were similar, but maintained that they were not the same, with "mourning" referring to grief or the grieving process and "melancholia" referring to depression.<sup>20</sup> In Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*, he writes: "In grief, the world looks empty to the person, and in depression, the person experiences the self as empty."<sup>21</sup> This brings awareness to the fact that there is a thin line between grieving and depression and Freud brought "this awareness."<sup>22</sup>

In discussing my grieving process, I am going to draw on Worden's four tasks indicated above. The seven determinants indicated above will be used to guide the discussion and interpret the experience utilizing relevant theoretical perspectives.<sup>23</sup> This foundation now refers to information contained elsewhere in my spiritual autobiography. Regarding the principle to accept the reality of the loss, I wrote, that night/morning around one o'clock a.m. I was home in bed sleeping. I woke up, looked at the clock and

<sup>19</sup> Granek, "Grief as Pathology," <http://dx.doi.org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/a0016991>.

<sup>20</sup> Worden. *Death, Dying, and Bereavement*, 91.

<sup>21</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia*, vol. 14, standard ed. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1957), 237-260.

<sup>22</sup> Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia*, 237-260.

<sup>23</sup> Nursing Answers, "An Essay on Loss and Grief," <https://nursinganswers.net/essays/experiences-of-loss-and-grief-case-study.php>.

my body froze. I could not move. I was numb. At two o'clock a.m., an hour later my sister called me and told me that when she went in to check on Daddy he was gone. "Jeff he's gone." I said, "Ok I'm on my way." When I got to my father's house my brother, two sisters, stepmother, aunts, and uncles were all there. Yes, my father had left us. After the hospice nurse had given us the paperwork, my uncle that works with me at the funeral home drove up with a hearse van to make the removal from the home. When he came into the house with the stretcher, before we put my dad on it, I asked the family to join hands in prayer. I asked my mom to grab Dad right hand while, I had Dad's left hand, and we all made a circle around Dad's bed. Hand in hand, I prayed a prayer for strength and a prayer that my dad's spirit would be received in heaven.

When it comes to the principle that calls a person "to process the pain of grief," after the prayer, we all hugged and kissed my dad. Then, my uncle and I placed my dad on the stretcher and took my dad to the funeral home, and we began to embalm him that morning. It was one of the hardest things I believe that I had to do, but I did it. Four days later, the whole family was together for our private viewing of my dad's body before it was open to the public. That morning, around eleven a.m. we all met in the funeral home yard and on the porch. We had prayer and then my uncle and I escorted my stepmother and family into the chapel to view my dad's body. We all had our moments of tears, crying, and sobbing. After twenty minutes had passed, we all begin to talk about my dad. My stepmother, sisters, brother, aunts, uncle, and the grandchildren all began to share things that my dad had did to them that was funny. Our mourning had turned into a moment of joy even if it was just for a moment.

I continue by adding that before we left the private viewing and allowed the public to come in, I offered another prayer. After the prayer, I told my family that I was going home, and that I would not be talking to anybody else for the rest of the day. I told them that I needed to be alone. Because the next day I had to preach my dad's eulogy. I also said that I needed to be alone to be by myself so I could cry, holler, cuss, cry some more, and then ask God to give me the strength that I needed to do my dad's eulogy. My family rallied around me and told me that they loved me and respected what I had to do. They said, "Jeff we understand. Do you and we will see you on tomorrow at the funeral."

On the day of the funeral, I got up early and went to the funeral home. I was the first one there. I unlocked the door, I got a chair, and I sat in front of the casket. I had a talk with my father about his eulogy and my being the patriarch of our blended family now. I told him to watch over us and if by chance I am not doing what I am supposed to be doing to let me know. "Because, dad I have some big shoes to fill." When the funeral started, I marched in with them during the service. Wonderful words were spoken about my dad during remarks, and everybody talked about his sense of humor and his love for his Dallas Cowboys. When the choir got up to sing, I stepped into the pastor's study and took off my suit coat to put on my robe. I then entered the pulpit because the eulogy was next. The choir finished singing and I sat there for a moment asking God for strength before I stood up. Everybody was looking at me as if I were going to crack. But I heard my dad's voice saying. "I never would have asked you to do it if I knew you couldn't." In that moment, it was like God had just renewed my spirit because a calmness came over me and I did what my dad wanted me to do. My dad had a glorious homegoing. I believe that

everyone was relieved more for me because I got through his eulogy with the help of the Lord.

Reflecting on the third task, “to adjust to a world without the deceased,” my spiritual autobiography notes that after the death of my father, I looked for him everywhere. Every time I entered the family funeral home business, I looked for him to be sitting behind his desk drinking a big mug of coffee and watching his westerns. I have learned that even though he is not here physically, I can feel him all over our funeral home and that brings me peace.

Kendra Cherry’s article is a positive reminder that one can go back and forth between the stages of grief rather than going through them in a linear manner. She mentions that it is okay to acknowledge that daily routines have been disrupted and need to be adjusted in due time, at one’s pace. It is also okay to feel the ranging spectrum of emotions without disrupting them. She finally mentions it is not okay to compare losses with others but to walk through the process no matter how close the loved one was emotionally.<sup>24</sup> Lexi Behrndt echoed a similar sentiment when she remarked that “When we allow people room to grieve, to feel, and to be outside of the lines, we allow them an opportunity to be honest. On the contrary, when we admonish people to “stay strong” and “keep the faith” amid pain and grief, we sometimes force them into a mask and a facade.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Kendra Cherry, “Understanding Grief in the Age of the COVID-19 Pandemic,” Verywell Mind, last modified August 17, 2020, <https://www.verywellmind.com/understanding-grief-in-the-age-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-4801931>.

<sup>25</sup> Lexi Behrndt, “Making Room for Grief within the Church,” HuffPost, last modified May 14, 2016, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/making-room-for-grief-within-the-church-\\_b\\_7286748](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/making-room-for-grief-within-the-church-_b_7286748).

### *Engaging Grief Theory with Foundational Papers*

After examining the theory of grief within the discipline of psychology, we will also examine how this interacts with the overall project's biblical, historical, and theological foundations. The theory method engaged is that of integration where grief theory intersects with the various foundational chapters. Concerning the overall project, using Freud's "grief work" activities together with Worden's tasks and determinants, pastors and spiritual leaders can combine this with the word of God to aid members in the grieving process. Pastors can also collaborate with therapists, if this is beyond their scope, so that they can work together to provide holistic counseling for the bereaved.<sup>26</sup>

The biblical foundation examines Jesus as he experienced sorrows and grieving as seen in the chosen pericope of John 11:32-36. Some people are more emotional than others, while some may tell you what is on their mind all at once. This is clear from the text after "Martha said unto Jesus, Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died," while Mary was quiet (Jn. 11:21). Grief theory encourages the leader to not take this ministry from the people. Instead, the leader must empower the congregation to take ownership of caring for the grieving, knowing that there is a process that must be completed for the bereaved to recover and function at pre-loss levels. Jesus grieved freely, making it okay for one to grieve the loss of a loved one. With the help of experienced individuals, the bereaved can be "led to experience the fullness of grieving which Freud had mentioned was necessary for the mourning process."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Behrndt, "Making Room for Grief within the Church," [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/making-room-for-grief-within-the-church-\\_b\\_7286748](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/making-room-for-grief-within-the-church-_b_7286748).

<sup>27</sup> Behrndt, "Making Room for Grief within the Church," [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/making-room-for-grief-within-the-church-\\_b\\_7286748](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/making-room-for-grief-within-the-church-_b_7286748).

The historical chapter observed the life of Saint Augustine when he lost a beloved friend that was never named. First, he acknowledged the grief. Then he allowed himself to grieve through weeping. He identified the root of his grief outside the death of his friend, which included the closeness he had with the friend which took the place of God in his life. He recognized that his strain also came from the fact that he did not reconcile with his friend on religious beliefs before he passed. All these helped him through the grieving process, and he was able to overcome this with time, and with God's help, which he also mentioned.

In light of the grief theory, facilitators, pastors, leaders, counsellors, clinicians, friends and family, can glean much from the analysis of Augustine's handling of grief. As Freud identified the thin line between grief and depression, we see how someone needed to look into Augustine's grieving to identify what made it forceful and span over such a large period of time. The need for care could have been identified and even possibly acted on if there was someone equipped in his life to aid him in his dealing with grief. It is easy for one grieving to withdraw and fall into depression or not grieve properly. Grief theory together with spiritual care can aid a person to grieve wholistically.

The theological foundation looked at grieving in the African American community since the context of this project is the African Methodist Episcopal Zion church, a predominantly African American church. We examined the role that the church plays in the life of the grieving African American and, therefore, the role it plays as a support system for the bereaved. Even though this is the case, not many churches are equipped to support bereaved ones. This is due in part to the reshaping of the theological perspective as well as the need to direct a bereaved one to seek professional help.

Liberation Theology was the chosen theological theme, acknowledging that one had to be granted the space, the time, and even the professional help to grieve and be liberated from mindsets that have restricted grieving in the African American community. Integrating Liberation Theology with grief theory, we see that there must be an avenue whereby the bereaved must be liberated to seek both spiritual and clinical help during the process of grieving. Again, as we see that identifying and applying the tasks and determinants of Worden in counseling the bereaved will help liberate them from mindsets that could hinder the grieving process.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the integration of the discipline of psychology with the project theme of grief. The hypothesis is that if a grief awareness program is implemented, then the leaders will be equipped to provide pastoral care to those who are grieving. Within the discipline of psychology, we examined Grief Theory, first propagated by Sigmund Freud. This foundational work of Freud touched on important pillars of the grieving process that many have built on to create other models for grief today. Freud identifies the attachment of the bereaved to the deceased and the need for the therapist to aid in breaking that bond. He identified the emotional energy that is used in holding onto that attachment, and how *decathesis* is the process of severing that attachment, which is an indication of healing and a pathway to using that emotional energy to build new relationships. He then talks about the activities of grief work that involve being freed from the attachments, readjusting to life without the deceased, and then building new relationships. Freud further identified the fine line between grieving

and depression. William Worden further built upon these, with his tasks of grieving and then his seven determinants that give context to the nature of the relationship and attachment of the bereaved to the deceased.

This theory can be subtly integrated with the biblical foundation of this project where we see the Lord Jesus being an example of one who grieved freely, encouraging the bereaved to also do the same. It is integrated with the historical chapter where Augustine grieved also, but in an unusually long span of time. Grief theory proposes that a therapist could have aided this process so that it veered from the side of depression to the balanced side of grieving. Facilitators can glean insight from this integration as well. We also see how grief theory is integrated with Liberation Theology in the theological chapter where the scientific principles can aid the bereaved to be liberated from the mindsets that hinder the grieving process.

This research affirms that leaders and pastors can be made aware of the need for aiding grieving members within their church communities as they embrace some of these principles of grief theory or even collaborate with grief counsellors to guide the bereaved on a wholesome journey of grieving and recovery. Grief is certainly more prolonged and complicated among those who were deeply connected to a lost loved one. Theorists refer to the idea that people in a close relationship may experience a cognitive overlapping of their self-concepts, whereby features of the other are subsumed into one's own self-knowledge, and they may even confuse the self with the close other.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Mary C. Lamla, “Letting Go of a Relationship: Is Grief a Disorder?” *Psychology Today*, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/intense-emotions-and-strong-feelings/202203/letting-go-relationship-is-grief-disorder>.

The soul mate experience involves the sharing of emotional and subjective experiences, including the echoing of intellectual and personal interests that can bind two people together. Thus, navigating through the grief of loss may be far more complicated if we are involved in a soul mate relationship that shapes our self-concept. Psychiatrist Colin Murray Parkes described the pain of grief as “just as much a part of life as the joy of love; it is, perhaps, the price we pay for love, the cost of commitment.”<sup>29</sup>

Many studies based on attachment theories indicate that people for whom deep attachment and dependency fostered a sense of emotional security “are most vulnerable to grief problems when the person with whom they were entwined dies or leaves.” Individuals who developed a dependent attachment style early in life tend to form later relationships “that are concentrated on one person, and that person satisfies their need for human bonding.”<sup>30</sup>

As a result, the attached person experiences profound and prolonged grief when that person is gone. People whose stories are heavily interwoven with the deceased are more likely to view their self-identity as “closely linked with the deceased than bereaved people who do not meet the criteria for prolonged grief disorder.”<sup>31</sup> Focusing attention on the absence of their loved one activates feelings of yearning and distress because these people are more likely than other bereaved individuals to recall memories that involve the “lost self.”

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<sup>29</sup> Lamla, “Letting Go of a Relationship,” <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/intense-emotions-and-strong-feelings/202203/letting-go-relationship-is-grief-disorder>.

<sup>30</sup> Lamla, “Letting Go of a Relationship,” <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/intense-emotions-and-strong-feelings/202203/letting-go-relationship-is-grief-disorder>.

<sup>31</sup> Lamla, “Letting Go of a Relationship,” <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/intense-emotions-and-strong-feelings/202203/letting-go-relationship-is-grief-disorder>.

Our bonds with a deceased loved one can live on and on, but grief is often silently held in Western culture. Exposing one's long-term grief may result in social isolation. Researchers have found that regulating, suppressing, or hiding negative emotions tends to foster a griever's connection to others, allowing them to gain support.<sup>32</sup>

Since emotions such as distress or anguish can create discomfort or stress in the listener, they may limit potential support for the griever.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, and unfortunately, emotional avoidance and self-deception can be a way of successfully coping in the face of the pain of loss. For example, a study of marital loss in midlife found that smiling and genuine laughter in the bereaved while they discussed their deceased spouses resulted in better relationships with others and evoked compassion and the desire to comfort, as opposed to those who displayed only non "genuine or social laughter."<sup>34</sup> In Eastern cultures, where there tends to be a more dominant belief in the deceased's continued presence and a continuity between the living and the dead, the pressure to express positive emotions and "get over" one's grief is less "prominent."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Lamla, "Letting Go of a Relationship," <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/intense-emotions-and-strong-feelings/202203/letting-go-relationship-is-grief-disorder>.

<sup>33</sup> Lamla, "Letting Go of a Relationship," <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/intense-emotions-and-strong-feelings/202203/letting-go-relationship-is-grief-disorder>.

<sup>34</sup> Lamla, "Letting Go of a Relationship," <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/intense-emotions-and-strong-feelings/202203/letting-go-relationship-is-grief-disorder>.

<sup>35</sup> Lamla, "Letting Go of a Relationship," <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/intense-emotions-and-strong-feelings/202203/letting-go-relationship-is-grief-disorder>.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **PROJECT ANALYSIS**

This qualitative research study was designed as a Grief After the Cemetery Workshop to examine the levels of confidence pastors possess as they sit with people grieving life's challenges without their loved ones, and to equip them to become more effective and confident about dealing with grief as church and community leaders. The workshop aimed to test the hypothesis that if the church and community leaders are trained and equipped to deal with grief, then they can help their congregations and communities heal. It is a desire for them to tell their stories, become aware of their discomfort level about dealing with grief and their parishioners' grief, and gain the confidence and skills to connect, listen, and minister to grieving families in their church and community.

To reach and invite people to the workshop, flyers, social media posts, and invitation by word of mouth, was used. I also spoke to my presiding elder of the Laurinburg District of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church to have the flyer emailed out to all twenty-two pastors that serve on the district with me. I also spoke to the Community of Churches Fellowship Ministerial Alliance which I am a member of to attend.

The Grief after the Cemetery Workshop took place on a Friday morning through Saturday evening at Sandy Grove African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church Family Life

Center in Lumber Bridge, North Carolina. A group of five out of fifteen showed up to learn and deal with their own grief so that they could help others deal with their grief. Out of the five participants, three were pastors and two were lay persons. Two of the three pastor had pursued their Clinical Pastoral Education and the other three were delighted to be there to learn and to be educated about grief. All participants were excited to be involved in this grief project and found it very helpful to have dialogue about such a strong topic.

The morning opening session of day one began with registration and gathering. As the participants gathered, they enjoyed a good breakfast from McDonald's along with hot coffee and orange juice. The five who showed up began to talk to each other and make connections with each other's ministries. As the time approached, I called the session to order. I welcomed them to the Grief Support After the Cemetery Workshop, and I thanked everyone for coming. I introduced myself as a doctoral student at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, working on my dissertation on grief, confirming why they were here today. Then I proceeded with the opening prayer. After prayer, I gave each participant a pre-test to see where they were with grief. Afterward, I gave them the purpose of the gathering and the participants' expectations that are related to the consent form, which is:

Purpose: I am conducting this project to raise awareness of the effects of grief in the local church. I will have a two-day educational and biblically-based workshop on Friday, September 24, 2021, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Saturday, September 25, 2021, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Requirements for Participation: You were invited because you might be grieving and is eighteen years old or older, have expressed an interest in participating, and are not in a vulnerable group that would include being a minor, cognitively, or mentally impaired or currently incarcerated.

Procedures: If you agree to participate in the project, you will be asked to read and sign a consent form, attend a two-day workshop that will be held on Friday, September 24, 2021, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and Saturday, September 25, 2021, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Workshop materials, continental breakfast, snacks, beverages, and lunch will be provided free of cost.

Risks: Every effort has been made to eliminate any risks that you may be exposed to while participating in this project. As a precaution, I will have professionally licensed and trained counselors onsite on the days of the workshop in the event you would request to speak to one of them in private. A designated “safe space” will be available for any participant needing private time away from the larger group.

Benefits: The benefits participants are expected to receive includes: (1) The definition of grief; (2) Similarities and differences of grief and bereavement; (3) Knowledge on the effects of grief on different people; (4) Being equipped to identify grief based on behaviors that are rooted in life experiences; (5) Provided resources for ongoing support, such as individual and group counseling; (6) Biblical principles such as Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection providing salvation, forgiveness, and a new identity in him to begin their journey toward healing; (7) Tools to share with others who may be affected by grief.

After the ground rules were established, I proceeded with my biblical reflection, which is John 11:1-36, focusing on verse thirty-five, Jesus wept.

The direct meaning of this verse is simple, when He went to the tomb of Lazarus, He shed tears. Its deeper implications touch on the complicated nature of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus is God the Son, He is one with God, and even participated in the Creation of the world with the Father and the Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

The Book of John says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn. 1:1). Verrett writes that

Jesus knew the will of God and that Lazarus would be returned to life. He did not weep because he was uncertain of his ability to do this miracle or because he feared Lazarus would stay dead. Jesus wept because he experienced and understood the same feelings as the people around him. The Lord Jesus lived a perfect life, overcoming sin, suffering, and even death itself, despite being clothed in flesh and subject to human weaknesses. Despite living a perfect life, standing before a tomb, he cried. For people, it does show that it is okay to grieve, to process strong emotions and terrible situations, and to cry.<sup>2</sup>

The workshop presenter is now ready to begin his presentation. So, I introduced the first presenter for day one, Dr. Thomas L. Francis. Dr. Thomas L. Francis was raised in Greenville, South Carolina, and resides in Atlanta, Georgia. He became an associate minister at Springfield Baptist Church, where his father Rev. D. C. Francis then pastored. He was also licensed to preach and ordained in Springfield Baptist Church under the leadership of Pastor John H. Corbitt. He pastored a startup congregation in Greer, South Carolina at the Christian Fellowship Church, and that church grew under his leadership.

Dr. Thomas L. Francis received a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Southern Wesleyan University, Central, South Carolina. He

<sup>1</sup> Bethany Verrett, “The Meaning of ‘Jesus Wept’: Bible Importance Explained,” Bible Study Tools, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/short-and-sweet-why-its-so-important-that-jesus-wept.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Verrett, “The Meaning of ‘Jesus Wept,’” <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/short-and-sweet-why-its-so-important-that-jesus-wept.html>.

matriculated thru the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC), Atlanta, Georgia, where he earned a Master of Divinity degree in Pastoral Care and Counseling and provides grief counseling at the Center for Behavioral Change in Atlanta, Georgia. Dr. Thomas L. Francis furthered his study and earned a Doctor of Ministry degree in Pastoral Care and Counseling from United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio, where he was called to return and become an adjunct professor in Pastoral Care and counseling, and he became the first professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at Carver College, Atlanta, Georgia. He presently instructs and assist ministers and pastors at United Theological Seminary, and from all corners of the nation to write dissertations and take an introspective look at their lives to become better outstanding, productive pastors without judgmental attitudes.

Dr. Francis, a hospice chaplain, shares in his book, *I Watch Them Die... and Dying Lives Matter*, a transparent synopsis of his life and how his journey led him to the bedside of many dying people of all cultures, generations, and spiritual influences. He is the author of this book and shares events leading up to integrating the school system in Greenville, South Carolina. The goal of the academic/personal book is to encourage church and community leaders to make peace with their mortality and inspire to remain present with dying patients and family members who suffer the end-of-life challenges. He writes, “Through dialogue with me in person, as well as through letters, dying patients and their family members expressed their feelings of loneliness and disappointment with the church as they faced the end-of-life challenges.”<sup>3</sup> Dr. Francis also published his first children’s book, *Grief Hit the Loon Family: Explaining Death and Dying to Children*. He

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Lenell Francis, *Grief Hit the Loom Family: Explaining Death and Dying to Children* (Atlanta, GA: TFran Publishing, 2017), 5.

allows children to explore their feelings while asking the difficult questions that death and dying brings.

Dr. Francis is also the Founder/CEO of Pastoral Care Institute of Atlanta, Georgia. The non-profit organization provides training and conferences in grief and other issues as it pertains to God's people. Dr. Francis has a passion for providing spiritual support to grieving patients and their family members as a hospice chaplain in Atlanta Georgia. Dr. Francis' petition to the church and community leaders is based on the promise that when they become transparent in their philosophy about the end of life, they can eliminate some of their unresolved fears and feelings of inadequacy. Enjoy as you read what God has given this author to share with you.

Dr. Francis then presented his presentation entitled: "Grief and Post Grief Workshop," equipping church leaders to remain present in an end-of-life crisis. Dr. Francis bought awareness to examine their end-of-life philosophy introspectively, remain present without fear throughout a family's end-of -life crisis, and provide needed support and information for family end-of-life tasks such as funeral arrangements and business notifications.

He continued to show and give the definition of grief, bereavement, and mourning. Then he explained the meaning of each, stating that grief is the normal and natural reaction to the death of a loved one. Anticipatory grief occurs when friends, family members, or significant others are grieving due to the imminent death of a person close to them. The emotional response is often characterized by feelings of anger, sadness, and guilt. Bereavement is the objective situation of being deprived due to the

death of someone significant, and mourning reflects the grieving practice of one's culture and the specific actions and manner of expressing grief.

As Dr. Francis continued with his presentation, he dealt with grief reconciliation, which is the internal experience. For some, it is an inside emptiness, a fear, panic, loneliness, anger, guilt, longing, or depression. Someone said, "Grief is love with no place to go." It is a process of learning to become more and more adapted to a new and changed way of living that does not include the deceased and how to deal with it. Well, it is dealt with by journaling, telling your story, grief writing, and a supportive network of relationships.

To understand the grief process is first to understand the greater the love felt for someone or the greater the emotional investment in a given situation, the greater the sense of loss felt when death, transition, or tragedy occurs. The depth of the grief process experienced is directly proportional to the depth of love experienced, invested, or needed. Grieving is an aspect of love, and healthy grieving is an act of love and remembering love. To better understand it, Dr. Francis introduces the five stages of death by Dr. Kubler Ross, which are Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance.

With this awareness, Dr. Francis presented to the participants who were present the need for churches and leaders to be more visible in the lives of family members as they are approaching or experiencing death. He also shared with the group that his experiences as a hospice chaplain and his clinical pastoral education training that support the grief process are a must. Furthermore, as he began to share his life stories with the group, I watched as the attitude changed toward the end of that session. The awareness of the grief process was taught to the five participants that were present.

After Dr. Francis' presentation, he opened the floor for discussion to see how the church leaders can be better equipped for their churches and the community they serve. This was day one, session one, and the first question asked was how can I get this workshop presentation at my church? One participant asked how do I tell my grandchildren about the death of the grandmother and that the tree that was planted in her memory is in memory of her, but it is not her? Dr. Francis responded by using his illustration book entitled: *Grief Hit the Loon Family Explaining Death and Dying to Children* and shared how this book has helped so many children understand and help with the healing process of their loved ones.<sup>4</sup> After the completion of the questions and answers for session one, there was a twenty-five-dollar raffle drawing to Olive Garden Restaurant. Then an hour lunch was provided by Smithfield Chicken and Bar-B-Q.

The evening session of day one began with the call to order, and we reconvened for the evening speaker. The workshop presenter was ready to begin her presentation. So, I introduced the second presenter, Rev. Mia J. Butler, for day one evening session. Rev. Mia J. Butler is a native of Lackawanna (Buffalo), New York, born and raised in the church, and accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as her personal Savior on Easter Sunday Morning at the age of sixteen at Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Brodie Johnson.

Rev. Butler was called to preach under this ministry at the age of nineteen but did not accept her call and vocation in the Foreign Missions Ministry until the age of thirty-four during her relocation to Greensboro, North Carolina, and became united with New Light Missionary Baptist Church under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Cardes H. Brown, Jr.

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<sup>4</sup> Francis, *Grief Hit the Loom Family*, 5.

She began the Minister in Training Program in April 2001, and Rev. Butler was licensed to preach under this ministry in June 2009. Ministries served in this body of Christ: Women in Service, Women and Mass Choirs, Orientation, Nursing Home, Prison, and Teacher of Sunday School. Together with her husband in 2010, Rev. Butler served under the ministry and leadership of the Late Pastor Tony Smitherman of Faith International Ministries, where she was ordained in May of 2013.

Rev. Butler has earned several degrees in academia with distinction: Mortuary Science Degree from Simmons Institute of Mortuary Science in Syracuse, New York, and is licensed in New York and North Carolina respectively entering her twenty-ninth year in Funeral Service. She has Two Bachelor of Arts Degrees, one in Psychology and another in Liberal Studies: Race, Class, and Culture., and One Master of Science Degree: Clinical Mental Health Counseling, and she has a Certification in Grief and Bereavement, and Marriage and Family Therapy.

Under the unction of the Holy Spirit, Rev. Mia served as Foreign Missions Pastor to Ghana, West Africa with association with Higher Praise Tabernacle (La Bodie), where Bishop Victor Mensah is Senior Overseer. Currently, Rev. Butler serves as an Associate Minister and teacher of the Ministers in Training (Christian Ethics) to the Pastor at New Zion Missionary Baptist Church under the leadership of Rev. William F. Wright, Jr., and continues to preach the gospel as a Foreign Missionary Pastor (Osofo means Preacher in the Twi language in Ghana) and Ambassador to the country of Ghana (Kokrobite, La Bodie Beach, Accra, Volta Region, Cape Coast, and Kumasi), West Africa. Rev. Butler is happily married to her husband Rev. Dr. Lawson L. Butler of nearly twenty years, and

together they have three young adult children: Kristopher Matthew, Kory Alexander, and Jade Nicole.

Rev. Butler serves as General Manager and Embalmer at Russell Funeral Home and Cremation in Siler City, North Carolina, and a Decedent Care Representative at Duke University Hospital in Durham, North Carolina.

Rev. Butler then presented her presentation entitled: “Grief,” and she instructed us before her presentation that she would do activity throughout her presentation, then she began her presentation by asking us about the dash on a tombstone between the date of birth and the date of death. What have we done with the time during the dash? Then she proceeded to define that “deep sorrow, especially that caused by someone’s death, is a feeling of deep distress caused by loss (sorrow). A state or feeling of great distress or discomfort of mind or body.”

After defining grief, she introduced us to Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross’ stages of grief, often referred to as DABDA, Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance. She then bought in activity one, and it was about “After Loss: The Day that Follows” this activity was about a person who may feel isolated and alone in grief. The flood of people is replaced by emptiness, mundane duties, and the ongoing task of sorting through paperwork and possessions. For many who grieve, the days after the funeral are exponentially more difficult than the funeral itself.

She continued the activity on getting through the weeks following the funeral by staying in touch with family members drawn to the funeral services. All of us are still in the grieving process together, and we should not expect ourselves to “return to normal.” You and your family are in a period of adjustment, learning how to proceed from the

painful events. The new “normal” will be life without the deceased. There is no timetable for when that will feel more comfortable.

Rev. Butler proceeded with her presentation on Mourning and Understanding Your Unique Grief. No one else will grieve in the same way you do it. If you feel like you are reacting differently than other people, know that is completely fine. Allow yourself to feel your own unique emotions and acknowledge your unique experience. Sudden losses, such as those due to trauma, accidents, or crime, may cause a stronger sense of loss, at least immediately, than more predictable losses, such as those due to terminal illness.

We must learn about the necessary tasks of mourning. You must learn to accept loss as a reality, both intellectually and emotionally. This can take time. Processing grief in response to a loss is a natural, emotional reaction. It does lessen over time, but the time it takes varies depending on your needs in adjusting to the world after loss. You may need to make various adjustments after a loss, including external such as living without what you lost, internally questioning your new role in the world, and spiritually finding new meaning after your loss. However, you have to recognize the physical symptoms of grief. Changes in sleep patterns, changes in appetite, loss or increase of appetite, crying, headaches or body aches, weakness or fatigue, feelings of physical heaviness, pain, stress-related symptoms such as nausea, rapid heart rate, insomnia and weight loss or gain.

Recognizing the signs of complicated grief refers to a process of mourning that does not lessen feelings of grief over time and may even cause worsening emotional trauma. Extreme focus on little or nothing other than your loss, prolonged denial of the

loss, feeling that life is meaningless or purposeless, inability to trust others, inability to think about positive experiences, or feelings of extreme irritability or agitation. Then the African American experience of grief is home going, which is a deeper meaning in spirituality and rituals in celebrating the life and existence of the deceased loved one, and the funeral is a ceremonial expression of grief in a quiet, calm, and stoic demeanor or posture, dress, music, quiet preaching, poems, and hymns.

Activity number two for the group consisted of a grief sentence completion that consisted of these sentences:

1. Right now, I feel...
2. I feel the saddest when...
3. The thing I miss most about the person I lost is...
4. Since the loss, things have been different because...
5. My family usually feels...
6. If I could ask the person I lost one thing, I would ask...
7. Something I liked about the person who I lost was...
8. One thing I learned from the person who I lost is...

As Rev. Butler continued with her presentation after activity number two, she informed us that it is ok to have Jesus and a therapist through prayer and meditation by staying connected with the house of worship. Reach out to your circle of friends and continue self-care activities. While having a therapist is simply talking to a professional, join a support group with your unique needs, create a memory wall, be gentle with yourself and figure out your new normal. In her conclusion, Rev. Butler gave us three more activities to do. One was to write a goodbye letter to the person we lost and to take the sheet of

paper with balloons on it and put names in each balloon that are supportive people in your life, and the string on the balloon is the ties that bind.

The questions and answers session was open to participants. Rev. Butler spoke of her grief about her mother's passing, which opened the door for the participants to express their journey about complicated grief and their need for healing themselves. As I listened, I realized the participants were just like me, and they needed healing themselves before they could care for someone else and offer them the proper pastoral care they needed. This open discussion session was impactful and moving. After completing the questions and answers session for day one evening session, the host gave closing remarks and words of encouragement, and a reminder of day two workshop sessions. It was also stressed about confidentiality between workshops and their commitment to attend both workshop sessions. Then we had a closing prayer and adjournment.

The morning opening session of day two began with gathering. As the participants gathered, they enjoyed a good breakfast from McDonald's along with hot coffee and orange juice. The five that showed up began to talk to each other as they did the day before. As the time approached, I called the session to order. I welcomed everyone back to the Grief Support After the Cemetery Workshop, and I thanked everyone for coming. I introduced myself once again as a doctoral student at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, working on my dissertation on grief which is why we are here today for part two of this workshop. Then I proceeded with the opening prayer. After prayer, I reminded everyone of the confidentiality agreement everyone signed and that what happens in this room stays in this room, and the purpose of the gathering and the participants' expectations related to the consent form was explained in

its entirety on yesterday. After the ground rules were reestablished, I proceeded with my biblical reflection, which is John 11:1-36 focusing on verse thirty-five, Jesus wept.

“The direct meaning of this verse is simple, when He went to the tomb of Lazarus, He shed tears. Its deeper implications touch on the complicated nature of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus is God the Son, He is one with God, and even participated in the Creation of the world with the Father and the Spirit. The Book of John says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Jesus knew the will of God and that Lazarus would be returned to life. He did not weep because He was uncertain of His ability to do this miracle or because He feared Lazarus would stay dead. Jesus wept because He experienced and understood the same feelings as the people around Him. T lived a perfect life, overcoming sin, suffering, and even death itself despite being clothed in flesh and subject to human weaknesses. Despite living a perfect life, standing before a tomb, He cried. For people, it does show that it is okay to grieve, to process strong emotions and terrible situations, and to cry.”<sup>5</sup>

The workshop presenter is now ready to begin his presentation. So, I introduced Dr. Thomas L. Francis once again as the first presenter for day two morning sessions. For the day two morning session, Dr. Francis’ presentation was entitled, “Challenging Emotional Holidays Feelings.” His first thought was about “Dreading the Coming Holidays,” which brings remembrance of events with loved ones, songs, poems, sayings, places, mall visits, stores, plays, and movies. We become not so happy in looking forward to the holiday events, and all of these can trigger sadness and lead to the reminder of grief.

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<sup>5</sup> Verrett, “The Meaning of ‘Jesus Wept,’” <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/short-and-sweet-why-its-so-important-that-jesus-wept.html>.

These triggers can result in crying, alienation from family and friends, lashing out at loved ones, avoiding phone calls, withdrawing in communication, remaining in bed, and avoiding turning on television or radio from memorable programs. All this is just a set of emotions felt in grief, shock, pain, numbness, the ache that has deepened.

Dr. Francis then began to explain that children grieve too. Therefore, we must consult with our children because children grieve in small doses and have moments of silence. So, ask them what they are feeling without telling them what they are feeling. Ensure them they can overcome because all they want is a sense of security.

Dr. Francis then began to expound on his book *Grief Hit the Loom Family Explaining Death and Dying to Children*. He stated:

Every child grieves differently. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Children learn by asking questions. When children ask questions about death, it is usually because they are curious, and they want to understand. When someone close to them die, small as they are, they experience grief. Grief can produce feelings such as shock, denial, anger, sadness, worry, relief, fear, or numbness or nothing. Grief may even be thoughts, such as “Who will take care of me now that my mom has died? Why do people get sick and die, Is this my fault? Life may not feel normal anymore. Remember their feelings are real.”<sup>6</sup>

After Dr. Francis completed his presentation, he opened the floor for questions and answers. There was one statement made and one question asked. The first statement that was made was that “Grief is real, but you cannot put everything on grief. Some people will use grief as a crutch just to get their way. And that put a darkness over the ones that are really grieving and that really needs the help.”

Then the question was asked about how do you go about explaining to children about grief? Dr. Francis responded as he did yesterday with the illustration of his book for children about the balloons, *Grief Hit the Loom Family: Explaining Death and Dying*

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<sup>6</sup> Francis, *Grief Hit the Loom Family*, 5.

to Children. After the completion of the questions and answers for session one, day two, there was a twenty-five-dollar raffle drawing to Olive Garden Restaurant, and then an hour lunch was provided by Smithfield Chicken and Bar-B-Q.<sup>7</sup>

The evening session of day two began with the call to order, and we gathered for the evening speaker. The workshop presenter was Rev. Mia Butler, but due to some unforeseen crisis, she could not come to the day two evening session. So, Dr. Francis asked me to talk about my losses and how it all ties in with my funeral homes. So, at this point, I started with how I began in the funeral business and the grief I personally experienced along the way.

My mom and dad never married, but my dad was married but not to my mom. My dad had three children by my mother and three children by my stepmother. My first personal experience with death was my brother's death when I was only a child myself. I remember it like it was yesterday. My stepmother's family did not want us at the funeral or have our names placed on the obituary. However, my grandfather and dad stepped in and had all that changed, and all the children's names were on the obituary, and the children were all seated together.

As children, we all grew up and became as brothers and sisters are to be. Then in 1995, our grandfather passed. Unfortunately, this was my second personal encounter with death. Being the oldest grandchild, my grandfather raised me as his own son. Then in 1999, I lost another brother due to a car accident. In 2006, I lost my grandmother, who raised me with her husband, my grandfather.

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<sup>7</sup> Francis, *Grief Hit the Loom Family*, 5.

Now, by losing my grandparents, I am in the family funeral home business. So, after my grandmother's passing, my dad, uncle, and I have equal shares in the business. During this time, a good family friend who started in the funeral business around the same time we did has taken ill. Thereafter, a neighbor and I looked after him until he died. When he died in 2014, he left me and his neighbor his funeral home. Well, just two years later, the neighbor died, and now I have full ownership of the funeral home.

Consequently, now I am thinking about what is next and how to deal with all this death. Well, just four months later, my dad died, and I just kept on as if nothing had ever happened like morticians do not need to grieve. Well, I was in Ohio the week of intensives for seminary, and Dr. Jerome Stevenson embarrassed me in front of the class after he read my spiritual autobiography. He asked me if I had any grief counseling or talked with anyone about the grief that I had experienced. I replied no, and he then responded by asking how I can help someone deal with grief, and I have not dealt with my own grief. I was infuriated and wanted to quit the program because I did not particularly appreciate being embarrassed in front of the class. After I cooled down, I talked it over with Russell Alexander, my carpool buddy. I reflected on all that was said and realized Dr. Stevenson was right. I then talked with someone about the grief I had experienced and suppressed all these years.

As I began to talk about my brother's death, my grandparent's death, my business partner's death, and my father's death, I began to cry. It felt like a weight being lifted off my shoulders, and I was able to breathe again. All this time, I was suffocating in grief and did not know it. The process of healing began, and I saw myself in the Kubler-Ross grief cycle of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. However, as quoted by

Benjamin Franklin, “only two things in life are certain, death and taxes.”<sup>8</sup> Death is something that affects us all. No one is immune as death is sometimes expected, sometimes unexpected. It happens to parents, grandparents, friends, relatives, pets, and others.

Death often takes away something very precious to us and leaves pain and grief in its wake. The pain that is associated with grief can be overwhelming. It is filled with a wide-range of feelings, behaviors, thoughts, and physical sensations. Grief often engulfs us. It comes in like a wave at the beach, and unfortunately, we never know when it is going to hit. When people are grieving, it is not unusual for them to believe that they are going crazy. They often do not understand the range of experiences they are going through. They only know that they hurt.<sup>9</sup>

After sharing, the floor was then opened for questions and answers. The first question was, what would you tell someone who has lost a loved one about grief? My response was, do not do as I did. Try to work the grief away because until you deal with it, all you are doing is piling it up, and the rug is getting higher and higher.

See with me, I dealt with death all the time because I have two funeral homes. By dealing with death, I suppressed my grief to get the family through their grief, and the grief that I never dealt with was still there. I went on to explain that at times I would just take a slow walk, shed a tear, pull it together, and go back to business as if nothing had ever happened.

The next question asked was, how do you deal with grief when the dying person did not tell anybody they were dying? My response was denial because they had not accepted they were dying themselves or did not want anybody feeling sorry for them or

<sup>8</sup> Ruth Ann Minner, “Death and Taxes Quotes,” BrainyQuote, <https://www.brainyquote.com/topics/death-and-taxes-quotes>.

<sup>9</sup> Minner, “Death and Taxes Quotes,” <https://www.brainyquote.com/topics/death-and-taxes-quotes>.

perhaps they felt dying alone was better for them. However, nobody should have to die alone, and everybody needs somebody. Then the participants began to share their personal stories on grief.

### **Methodology**

This research used the qualitative methodology to test the hypothesis. This was done by using pre-and post-tests before and after the workshop. There were twelve questions asked in the pre- and post-tests. The pre-test was given to all participants on Friday morning at the opening session, and the post-test was given on Saturday evening before the closing of the last session.

The purpose of the test was to seek clarity on what participants thought before the workshop compared to what was learned after the workshop. The participants answered the questions by putting an X next to the best answer that applied to their level of awareness and their feelings dealing with grief. In both tests, I asked the following questions:

1. What age do you have to be to experience grief?

18 – 25     25 – 35

35 – 45     45 – 55

55 – 65     65         All the above

2. How many months after the death of your loved one should you experience healing?

3 months     6 months     9 months     12 months     13 months

3. Grief can have a positive and negative effect.

True  False

4. Counseling can be significant in healing from grief.

True  False

5. I was drawn to the workshop because I am experiencing complicated grief.

True  False

6. Is race significant on how you experience grief?

Yes  No

7. The definition of grief is:

Deep and poignant distress caused by or as if by bereavement.

True or  False

8. The following are examples of grief reactions:

Shock, disbelief, guilt, and anger.  True or  False

9. Do you feel yourself longing or yearning for the person who died?

Not at All  Slightly  Somewhat  Quite a bit  Overwhelmingly

10. Grief may cause the following reactions:

(a) Aches and Pain  (b) Nausea

(c) Loss of Appetite  (d) All the above  (e) None of the above

11. Grief can affect you in which of the following areas:

(a) Physical Health  (b) Mental Health

(c) Relational Health  (d) Spiritual Health

(e) All the Above  (f) None of the Above

12. Stages of grief are:

- (a) Denial       (b) Anger  
 (c) Bargaining       (d) Depression  
 (e) Acceptance       (f) All the Above       (g) None of the  
 Above

These questions were put together to see the knowledge and the willingness of the participants before and after the Grief After the Cemetery Workshop to measure the success of the two-day workshop. At the conclusion of the workshop, I gave out helpful handouts and pamphlets. I also ordered Dr. Thomas L. Francis' book entitled "*I Watch Them Die... and Dying Lives Matter*" from Amazon and gave them to all participants in attendance for this two-day workshop. All that attended appreciated the information and the material they received at this workshop.

### **Summary of Learnings**

Table 3. Research findings of the pre-test and the post-test

Pre-Test		Post-Test			
Response Range	Response True / Agree	Response False / Not Agree	Response Range	Response True / Agree	Response False / Not Agree
Question # 1	5	0	Question # 1	5	0
# 2	3 for 13 months	2 for 12 months	# 2	5 for 13 months	0
# 3	5	0	# 3	5	0

# 4	5	5	# 4	5	5
# 5	1	4	# 5	4	1
# 6	3	2	# 6	5	0
# 7	4	1	# 7	5	0
# 8	4	1	# 8	5	0
# 9	4 somewhat	1 a little	# 9	5 somewhat	0 a little
# 10	5	1	# 10	5	0
# 11	5	0	# 11	5	0
# 12	5	0	# 12	5	0

As shown in the chart above, the pre-test reports that almost 95% of the participants are dealing with their grief and are comfortable talking about it. In the post-test, the number reporting has just about gone up to 100%, and I was pleased to observe this increase in the participants' willingness to deal with grief. I found it interesting that in question six, I asked, "Is race significant on how you experience grief?" in the pre-test, it is 75% compared to the post-test at 100%.

Finally, following the Grief After the Cemetery Workshop, I informed the participants that I would be willing to speak to their congregations or any family members at their request regarding grief. I am not only a pastor, a mortician, but I am someone that has dealt with levels of grief, and I might be able to help someone in their time of need. I also informed the participants that this workshop bought awareness to them and imagine the benefits of having this incorporated into their church as a ministry. Many of our church members and pastors are walking around with grief on their

shoulders and do not know what to do with it. So, with this ministry implemented into the local churches, it would do wonders for grieving families.

Sometimes, people need a mediator. Someone who can bring peace to their mind and spirit as they talk about their loved one. Furthermore, to bring peace to families that might be torn apart because it might be just one uncontrollable person, but in a grief session, they could say how they feel without judgment. I believe that the Lord God above has given spiritual powers to certain people to walk with through the suffering and grief during their darkness to bring light, hope, and restoration after their grief.

I found out there are many ministers with little or no pastoral care training. During this two-day session, this was proven. There were only five people out of fifteen that showed up for this workshop, and there are twenty-two pastors in my church's denomination district, and not one pastor showed up. There are six churches in the Ministerial Alliance that I serve in, and not one pastor showed up. So, I think that I have proven my hypothesis. There is a need for grief support in the local church, but it must be instilled into the pastors' hearts first.

## Conclusion

Losing someone we love really hurts. Grief often takes over and like a vine, begins to choke the life out of our soul. Our emotions are numb. Tears don't seem to stop. All we want to do is be alone and be by ourselves. Losing a family member or a friend is a very personal and emotional experience. Even Jesus himself experienced the gamut of emotions that comes with losing a friend. When Jesus' friend Lazarus dies, he weeps. Even though he knew he would raise Lazarus back to life, he was still overwhelmed with emotion that he just began to cry. Jesus teaches us that it is ok to grieve. It is ok to cry.

Jesus not only lost his good friend Lazarus to death, he also lost his dear friend and cousin, John the Baptist. John the Baptist died a terrible death. John was arrested by Herod, because John was vocally disapproving of Herod's sin.

However, after the debase Herod watched a teenage girl's seductive dance, he gave her the opportunity to ask for anything. At the influence of her mother, she asked for the head of John the Baptist. John the Baptist, whom Jesus called the greatest born of men, died by beheading at the request of a teenage girl. John's disciples took care of burying his body and they went to tell Jesus.

In Matthew 14:13, we are told that when Jesus heard the news about John, he got on a boat and went to head to a desolate place. You see, Jesus was grieving. He was heartbroken to hear what happened to John. And Jesus wanted to just spend some time alone, praying and thinking. You have to wonder what thoughts were running through Jesus mind when he heard the news. I imagine that he must be thinking about his mission, the cross. Jesus knows that what happened to John the Baptist is going to happen to him. Jesus knows that he came to die for the sins of humanity, and he knows that the cross is coming. I'm sure hearing about the death of John made Jesus painfully aware of his coming death, and filled with emotion, he just wanted to be alone with His father.

So, Jesus gets in the boat and heads to a desolate place. However, the crowd hears where Jesus is going. So, they travel by foot and meet Jesus on the other side. As Jesus is approaching the shore, he sees the crowds gather, waiting for him to arrive. You almost feel kind of sorry for Jesus. The guy just wants to get away to mourn the loss of his friend, and he can't get away. Life is like that isn't it? It never slows down. You lose your family member or friend and your back at work the next day like nothing ever happened. All you want to do is get away and be by yourself and grieve, but the demands of life don't allow it. Life just moves to fast.

Put yourself in Jesus' shoes for a second. How would you respond to seeing the crowd on the shore? You might think, "Really God, ministry now, I just want to be alone!" You might even hate these people, wishing they would just all go away. However, Jesus doesn't respond in either way. Jesus sees the crowd and he has compassion on them, and he immediately got to work healing their sick. Although Jesus grieves the loss of his dear friend, his grief empowers him for ministry. In the midst of his emotional pain, Jesus turned outward instead of inward. Rather than turning in on himself and thinking "woe is me," he turns outward to serve and to love the crowds.

What does Jesus tell us about how to handle grief? He tells us that we must use our grief for ministry. We must be so very careful that in our mourning we don't turn our sorrow in to self-pity and loathing. Our sorrow empowers us to love and serve others. All that hurt, all those emotions you feel, take them and use them to show compassion on people who desperately need the love of Jesus. In your brokenness, God is able to use you to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others. In your desperation, your dependence on Jesus serves as a powerful testimony to this lost and dying world. It is ok to grieve. It is ok to cry. It is good to mourn for

lost loved ones, but may our emotions turn outwards to radical, Gospel driven, compassion.<sup>10</sup>

As Christians, we will all experience grief when our loved ones die; but we are to maintain a sense of hope, even during our grief and sorrow. Remember, our grief in this world is only temporary, it will not extend into eternity. Our hope comes from the fact that Jesus Christ defeated death. Nothing will ever replace the loss of our loved ones on this earth, but nothing will ever surpass our reunion with them in heaven as we spend eternity with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So, to get this “Grief Support in the Local Church” project established, I would begin it at the context where I served. Then after I have gotten the program up and running, I would invite my Presiding Elder who serve over twenty-two churches in my district to come in and evaluate the program. Then afterwards give a seminar on the district level on “Grief Support in the Local Church.” That will reach all twenty-two churches within the district that I serve. By doing this, I believe that this project will eventually be reached to churches around the world.

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<sup>10</sup> Justin Deeter, “Writings on Scriptures, Ministry and the Christian Faith,” JustinDeeter.com, <https://www.justindeeter.com/articles/archives/864>.

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